

Saturday 30th March: Cambridge Meeting

Editorial

The Age of the Internet may have its drawbacks (the Powyses being happy antidotes to this), but its many huge advantages are not least in literary matters. Interesting new developments for the Society are reported by Paul Cheshire (JSTOR) and Kevin Taylor (Ebooks).

Henry James (1843-1916), like JCP, photographed well, but while JCP appears different each time, HJ's noble countenance is always impressive: as JCP says, potentially both cruel and tender. It dominated a recent cover of the TLS. Our cover shows HJ unusually in profile, and he appears inside visiting Glastonbury and Montacute in 1872, also in notes taken from one of many lectures on him by JCP, who deeply admired him, and in a view of the two similar but different giants by Chris Thomas. Chris also introduces the painter Bror Nordfeldt whom JCP admired, associate of Maurice Browne in Chicago.

A tribute from a neighbour to John Francis Powys (grandson of TFP) who died last May, is illustrated by the head of a fairground-horse given to him by Phyllis and JCP (who also owned one as a household god, named Falada as in the fairytale).

Queries about *Glastonbury* inconsistencies are followed by notes by Susan Rands on the origin of the Marquess of P, and references in a talk to the Glastonbury Antiquarian Society on JCP's place among the large numbers of novels set there.

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ON OTHER PAGES

Cambridge meeting	2	The Master-Wizard's Wand	26
Committee nominations	3	David Goodway:	
AGM	5	<i>The Meaning of Culture</i>	31
New members	5	Geoffrey West:	
Powys Society online	5	An Essay on Culture (April 1930)	34
E-books	6	Michael Oakeshott: review of	
Conference 2019 draft programme	8	<i>The Meaning of Culture</i> (1929-30)	36
Conference speakers	10	JCP and B.J.O. Nordfeldt	39
John Francis Cowper Powys	14	Richard Betts:	
JFCP and the horse-head	15	<i>AGR</i> notes and queries	43
News and Notes	17	Susan Rands: The Marquess of P.	44
More on LIP photographs	20	Susan Rands:	
Henry James at Glastonbury	23	<i>AGR</i> in Historical Fiction	45
JCP: Notes on Henry James	24	Books for sale	48

Two contemporary (1930) reviews of JCP's *The Meaning of Culture* give mainline reactions to this most popular of those 'sermons' of life-techniques addressed to 'ordinary' readers. Our December meeting in Hampstead with David Goodway focused on *MoC*, which DG is among many in finding the most successful of JCP's non-fiction. These books, all different but none inconsistent, from *The War and Culture* (1914) to *In Spite Of* (1953), all see the individual as the moving power, self-creating in an unknowable cosmos.

JCP's conclusion to *Pleasures of Literature* (1937, another book specifically devoted to reading) has the last word on Culture:

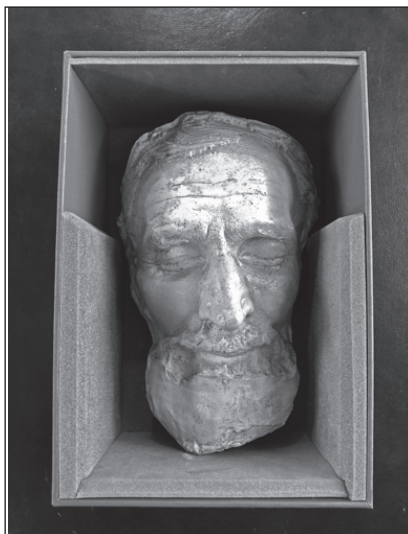
For it may well be that what gives us the deepest happiness we know is merely to touch, though we ourselves and the books that inspire us must sink into oblivion, that level, that dimension, that plane of existence, from which proceeds the inexplicable imperative to follow goodness and mercy in a world built upon a different plan.

KK

Meeting in Cambridge
Saturday 30 March 2019

To celebrate the **50th anniversary of the Powys Society** a special meeting has been organised which will take place on **Saturday 30 March commencing 10.00 am** at the *alma mater* of the Powyses, Corpus Christi College, in Trumpington Street, Cambridge. The venue is the New Combination Room which is located off the New Court of Corpus Christi. Planned speakers include our Chairman Timothy Hyman, Hon. Secretary Chris Thomas, Vice-Chairman David Goodway and Lucy Hughes, archivist of Corpus Christi College. Charles Lock, editor of the *Powys Journal*, will pay a tribute to our President Glen Cavaliero, who will be present.

John Hodgson, past Chairman, will lead an open discussion of Chapter 5 of JCP's *Autobiography* which covers JCP's time in Cambridge in the 1890s: members are



Death mask of Llewelyn Powys



Parker Library, Corpus Christi College (K Taylor)

encouraged to read this chapter in advance of the meeting. A selection of items from the college's Powys archive, including Littleton's photograph album, will be on display (this is also a rare opportunity to see Llewelyn's original death mask). Lunch will be taken in the impressive and historic surroundings of the college dining hall. In the afternoon we plan to visit places in Cambridge associated with JCP.

To register for the event website and see the full programme of the meeting please visit the '**News and Events**' page of our web site. The cost of registration which includes two-course lunch and all refreshments is £20.00 per person. You can also register for the event by sending a cheque, payable

to The Powys Society, to Hon Secretary (address inside front cover of the Newsletter).

Members may wish to consult an article by Stephen Powys Marks in *Powys Journal* Vol XIII, 2003, 'Powys Family Connections in East Anglia', which includes a section on 'The Cambridge Connection'. See also 'JCP in the 1890s' by Theo Dunnett in *Powys Review*, No.16, 1985; *John Cowper Powys, the Lyons and W.E.Lutyens* by Susan Rands (Cecil Woolf, 2000), and Thomas Henry Lyon, Architect of Middlecott, Ilsington by Susan Rands in *Devon and Cornwall Notes and Queries*, Parts I-III, 1995-1996.

Everyone is welcome to participate in the event.

Chris Thomas, Hon. Secretary

Committee Nominations 2019-2020

Nominations are invited for **Honorary Officers** and **Members** of the Powys Society committee to take effect from August 2019.

All paid-up members, including Honorary members, are entitled to submit nominations for the committee. Nominations must include the name of the **Proposer** and the **Seconder** and should be submitted in writing, or by e-mail, including a statement confirming the **Nominee's agreement**.

Nominations should be sent to the Hon. Secretary by e-mail to chris.d.thomas@hotmail.co.uk or by post to 87 Ledbury Road, London W11 2AG.

Nominations must be received by **Friday 1 June 2019**.

Current **Honorary Officers** of the Powys Society committee are:

<i>Chairman</i>	Timothy Hyman
<i>Vice-Chairman</i>	David Goodway
<i>Secretary</i>	Chris Thomas
<i>Treasurer</i>	Robin Hickey

Nominations are sought for the **four** positions of the **Honorary Officers** from August 2018.

Current **members** of the **Powys Society committee** are: **Kate Kavanagh** (*Newsletter editor*), **Dawn Collins and Paul Cheshire** (who have 2 years left to run of their three-year term of office); **John Hodgson, Michael Kowalewski** (*Collection Liaison Officer*) and **Kevin Taylor**, (who have 1 year left to run of their 3-year term of office); and **Louise de Bruin** (*Publications Manager and Conference organiser*) whose term of office expires in August 2019. **Jacqueline Peltier** continues to serve as honorary committee member; and **Charles Lock** (editor of the *Powys Journal*) serves as *ex-officio* member of the committee.

Nominations are sought for **one** vacant position of **membership of the committee**.

Chris Thomas, Hon. Secretary

AGM 2019

This gives notice that the Annual General Meeting of the Powys society will be held at **11.00am on Sunday 18th August** at the Hand Hotel in Llangollen.

All paid up members of the Powys Society are eligible to participate in the AGM whether or not they are attending the conference.

Chris Thomas, Hon. Secretary

New Members

We are very pleased to welcome four new members to the Powys Society, who have joined since the last announcement published in *Newsletter* 95, November 2018. New members are located in Oxford, Llanidloes in Wales, Rutland in Leicestershire and Oze

in France. This brings the current total membership of the Society to 256, including Honorary members, and allowing for other members who are deceased, or who have either resigned or not renewed their membership.

Chris Thomas, Hon. Secretary

Paul Cheshire

Powys Society Online

I was very pleased to join the committee of the Powys Society at the last AGM. Aside from the great privilege of proof-reading the E-Book version of *A Glastonbury Romance* (with censored cuts restored), I have taken part in two projects that enhance the Society's online presence.

PayPal

PayPal has established itself over the last twenty-five years as an affordable alternative to the online credit card payment facilities offered by banks. It suits small organisations such as ours, who use their websites to collect membership subscriptions from overseas, and to provide a quick way for any passing browser to sign up for membership online.

The Society owes a great debt to Frank Kibblewhite, the Powys Society webmaster, who – for all the years he has been running the Society's website – has collected subscriptions on our behalf through his Sundial Press PayPal account. This means he has been burdened with the task of periodically disentangling Sundial and Powys Society transactions in order to send us the proceeds. Web-based payments will become ever more important to our growth and survival, so we decided last autumn to set up the Society's own PayPal account. As a first step, our website has payment buttons for subscriptions, for the 50th Anniversary Day at Cambridge, and for one trial publication (*Proteus*). We will soon be expanding this and providing payment buttons for all the Society's publications and accessories. The website design work falls to Frank, and I am glad to have eased some of his burden by taking on the running of the Society's PayPal account.

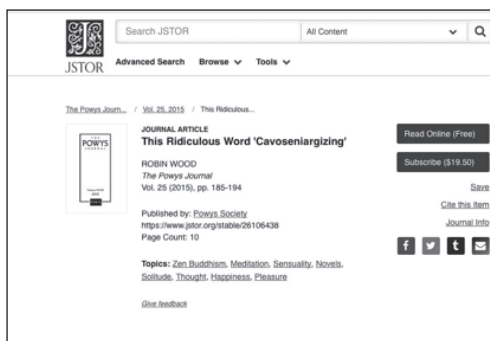
The Powys Journal on JSTOR

JSTOR (short for Journal Storage) is a digital library founded in 1995. Originally containing digitized back issues of academic journals, it now also includes books and primary sources, and current issues of journals. Access is mostly gained through institutional / library membership, and readers who are used to accessing JSTOR through their university or other institution should be warned that *The Powys Journal* is part of JSTOR's new 'Lives of Literature' series, which their institution may not yet have added to their standard JSTOR package. This uptake

will take time. For personal users the news is better: in recent years JSTOR have expanded options for personal non-institutional access, and I will show below how to access JSTOR articles for free.

Chris Thomas and Charles Lock had completed all the steps towards putting the Powys Journal onto JSTOR before I came on the scene, and I can take no credit here. I have gladly come in after the heavy lifting to take on the role of what Chris has called JSTOR Manager. So far this has involved making sure our Journal's home page at JSTOR <<https://www.jstor.org/journal/powysj>> includes full information about the Journal, and arranging for links from our Society's own website to point at it. Arriving at this home page the menu of articles can be expanded, and individual articles selected for viewing. Or you can use the JSTOR search facility to look for content specific to the Journal.

I will give one example of the wider online visibility this full digitalisation of the *Powys Journal* achieves. The entire contents of the *Powys Journal* are included in any general online search results. Enter into Google the single search term 'cavoseniargize', and the first hit to be listed is a link to 'This Ridiculous Word "Cavoseniargizing"' by Robin Wood from the *Powys Journal* 25 (2015). A click on this takes you to the article displayed on the PJ's JSTOR home page. The screenshot (right) shows the resulting JSTOR menu. There is a button giving the option to read this article for free, or, if you want to download more than six articles a month, you can buy a month's JSTOR access for \$19.50. Do try cavoseniargizing at home.



Kevin Taylor

eBooks: a first for the Society

On 27 January 2019 the Powys Society published its first ever eBooks. Digital editions of the following four works are now available to download to the **Amazon Kindle** and can be read on the Kindle itself and any other device with a Kindle app including phones, iPads and PCs: *Owen Glendower* and *Porius* by John Cowper Powys; *The Brothers Powys* by Richard Perceval Graves; and *Recollections of the Powys Brothers* ed. Belinda Humfrey. Each eBook costs £9.99 (or \$13.19 from Amazon's US site).

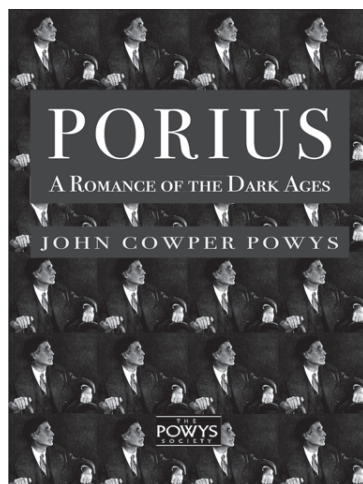
The project to create eBooks began in June 2017 when Tim Hyman, Chris Thomas, Dawn Collins and I met the literary agent representing the Powys Estate, Christopher Sinclair-Stevenson. I had noticed that, while many of JCP's early works of fiction and

philosophical writing and his *Autobiography* were available as eBooks in the Faber Finds series, there were no equivalent digital editions of the four Wessex novels or the two great Welsh novels. Discussion with Christopher confirmed that the rights situation with those six works was far from clear or straightforward. It took a while, but by the late summer of 2018 I had satisfied myself that the Society would be within its rights to go ahead and scan the texts of the six novels, a process undertaken in Chennai by a company called Newgen. The Committee of the Society agreed which versions should be scanned, and also to add to the project two secondary works – the extremely useful but long out-of-print books of Richard Graves and Belinda Humfrey. Copyright in *The Brothers Powys* (1983) had already been generously assigned to the Society by Richard; and Belinda kindly said that she would have no objection to our including *Recollections of the Powys Brothers* (1980).

Newgen did an excellent job of scanning the eight texts, to an accuracy level of at least 99.995%. Digital scanning will always produce a few errors, so throughout the autumn I checked the e-files with the help of members of the Committee. We found a handful of minor errors for correction, and no doubt a few will remain in the published works, but they include a link to the Society website so that any readers spotting errors in the future can notify me. On the whole, the eBooks are of an extremely high standard and include hyperlinks to illustrations, footnotes and chapter headings where appropriate. One of the most valuable features is that they are fully searchable. Reading *Porius* on my iPhone is a new kind of experience; but being able to search and instantly locate every instance of ‘cavoseniargizing’, ‘stinkhorn fungus’, ‘yr Wyddfa’ or any other word in this 750-page masterpiece is something else again!

The eBooks project was generously funded by the Society and by large donations from two individual members. It is not a commercial venture and we have little expectation of covering our costs. The driver was simply to make these great books available again, and in a form accessible to a new generation of readers who increasingly expect to use digital versions. I am particularly grateful to Dawn Collins for designing the covers, and to Mandy and Will Powys (the copyright holders of JCP’s works), Morine Krissdóttir and Christopher Sinclair-Stevenson for their support and interest.

The eBooks of the Wessex novels (*Wolf Solent*, *A Glastonbury Romance*, *Weymouth Sands* and *Maiden Castle*) are also ready to publish, but rights issues are causing further delays with those four. We have made a strong start though, and I look forward to reporting further progress in a future *Newsletter*.



Porius ebook

The Powys Society Conference, 2019

The Hand Hotel, Llangollen

Friday 16th August to Sunday 18th August

‘Adventures with Ideas’

This year we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Powys Society. It is fitting that, in this anniversary year, we return to a favourite and, by now familiar, venue, the Hand Hotel, in Llangollen, surrounded by the sacred water of the river Dee and the craggy ruins of Castell Dinas Bran. For the adventurous there are plenty of places further afield worth exploring, such as Valle Crucis, the steep sided valley of Edeyrnion, Glydyfrdwy, Corwen and Caer Drewyn, Llangar church, Rug chapel, Chirk castle, and Thomas Telford’s Grade 1 listed aqueduct (now a world heritage site) with its startling vertiginous views of Afon Dyfrdwy and the Dee valley far below. Nearby Llantysilio mountain, the Berwyns and Clwydian range provide exciting opportunities for walks on lofty hilltops, amidst purple heather moorland from where you may, if lucky, spot merlins, and golden plovers. Here there are also rocky limestone outcrops, ancient woodlands and forests where elm, hazel, and oak grow thickly and where there are wild plants such as rockrose, thyme and St John’s Wort.

Other adventures, of the mind, will be offered by our speakers. We are pleased to welcome **Janice Gregory** as a speaker to our conference. Janice has been a regular visitor from USA since 2011 and has already tantalised us with tales of her connections with her great-aunt Alyse. Janice will present a talk on the life and family background of Alyse bringing forward many new facts and information about her relationship with Llewelyn and Alyse’s life after Llewelyn’s death. We are also delighted to welcome back to a Powys Society conference Professor **Elmar Schenkel**, who teaches English literature at the University of Leipzig. Elmar has been a friend of the Society since our early days and first published an article about JCP in Germany in the *Powys Review* No.4, in 1978. Elmar will present a talk on the connections between JCP and the philosophy of Nietzsche and will also talk about his recent work as a warden at the Nietzsche birthplace museum in Röcken in Saxony. The relationship between JCP and Nietzsche is close (JCP was introduced to Nietzsche by his brother Theodore and both were amongst Nietzsche’s first readers in English in the 1890s). Nietzsche’s influence on JCP may be detected in the themes explored in some of his early poetry as well as his first novel *Wood and Stone*. It is not difficult to imagine JCP finding an affinity with Nietzsche’s description of his role as a thinker and writer: *we free spirits...and adventurers of the inner world called “man”*. **Chris Campbell** will offer a ‘cross-cultural reading’ of the prose of JCP and the poetry

of the Barbadian author Kamau Brathwaite focusing on differing responses to the landscape of the west country of England in JCP's *Weymouth Sands* and the Caribbean in Brathwaite's poetry. **Goulven le Brech**, who comes to the conference from France, will consider JCP's contribution to the important series of *Little Blue Books* published by the social reformer, author and editor, Emanuel Haldeman-Julius in America in the 1920s. These short, inexpensive, and mass-produced, pocket books, covering a broad range of subjects, provided JCP with an opportunity to present his ideas about his philosophy of life to a wide and popular readership. Other works in the series included titles by JCP's friend Will Durant who later included a passionate tribute to JCP in his book *Adventures in Genius*. **David Goodway** has strong memories of early meetings and discussions in the 1960s that led to the formal foundation of the Society. David will talk about his memories, the early days of the Powys Society and some of the people involved in setting up and running the Society.

Local Corwen officials have been invited to the **reception** on Friday night. The Chairman will make a special presentation of items, including books, Society publications, photos, newspaper clippings, and copies of letters relating to the period JCP and Phyllis lived at Corwen, all of which will be permanently placed in the Corwen information centre and museum for reference and use by visitors.

The **Llangollen steam railway** now runs direct from Llangollen into the centre of Corwen (journey time about 40 minutes) where a new railway station has been constructed providing access to Corwen Interchange and other local transport links. The journey by rail from Llangollen to Corwen along the picturesque Dee valley, often used by JCP and Phyllis, was described by JCP in his unfinished novel *Edeyrnion* (published in *PJ*, Vol. 1, 1991). This would make an enjoyable trip on our free afternoon on Saturday. Guests are recommended to book for this service individually in advance at Llangollen station. Suggestions and helpful information about visits to other places of interest will be provided at the registration desk.

On Saturday night **Richard Graves** will present a lecture entitled 'John Cowper Powys and Merlin' in what he describes as "the proper Powysian manner."

The book room will be open, as usual, at selected times. This year we expect an even larger number of donated titles to be available for purchase. If anyone has any books they wish to donate please bring them along to the sale. All donations are very much appreciated.

Chris Thomas, Hon. Secretary

Draft Conference Programme

Friday 16th August

- 16.00 Arrival
- 17.30 Reception
- 18.30 Dinner
- 20.00 **Janice Gregory:** ‘Alyse Gregory – Out of the Shadows’

Saturday 17th August

- 08.00 Breakfast
- 09.30 **Elmar Schenkel:** ‘Saving the Übermensch – Some Observations on J.C. Powys and Friedrich Nietzsche’
- 10.45 Coffee
- 11.15 **Chris Campbell:** ‘Excavating and Extracting: The archaeology and aesthetics of historical memory in the novels of John Cowper Powys and poetry of Kamau Brathwaite’
- 13.00 Lunch
- Afternoon free – recommended journey by steam railway from Llangollen to Corwen
- 19.00 Dinner
- 20.30 **Richard Graves:** A lecture on ‘John Cowper Powys and Merlin’

Sunday 18th August

- 08.00 Breakfast
- 09.30 **Goulven le Brech:** ‘The Philosophy of *The Little Blue Books*’
- 10.45 Coffee
- 11.00 AGM
- 12.00 **David Goodway:** ‘The foundation and early days of the Powys Society’
- 13.00 Lunch
- 15.00 Departure

The Speakers

Janice Gregory is the great-niece of Alyse Gregory and Llewelyn Powys. Janice resides in Newburyport, Massachusetts, where she writes and runs a business coaching company. She has spent most of her career as a professor and small-business advisor for the University System of New Hampshire. Janice earned her BA in English literature from Harvard College and her master’s degree in public administration from Harvard’s Kennedy School. Janice reviewed *The Tortured Life of Scofield Thayer* by James Dempsey in the *Powys Journal*, Vol. XXVI, 2016 and

edited the letters of Alyse Gregory to Louis Wilkinson 1937-1939, published in the *Powys Journal*, XXVII, 2017. She has also written an introduction for Alyse Gregory's 1926 novel, *She Shall Have Music*, (Sundial Press, 2017).

Janice developed an avid interest in Alyse Gregory when she discovered in 2011 that the Sundial Press had republished Gregory's novels. Much to her delight and enrichment, Janice also met members of the Powys Society at our annual conference that year. Having had a memorable encounter as a young girl with her great-aunt, Janice has relished delving into Alyse Gregory's background. The author of *Alyse Gregory: A Woman at her Window*, Jacqueline Peltier, has provided invaluable assistance in Janice's work which has also included research into Alyse Gregory's correspondence and journals archived at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut. Throughout her life, Alyse Gregory adamantly kept to the shadows. Yet she wielded considerable power in determining the careers of modern writers, first in her role as *The Dial*'s managing editor and confidante to its owner, Scofield Thayer, and then as Llewelyn Powys' wife. Janice's talk will bring Gregory and her choices into the light. It will examine the crucible of Gregory's times and family background which forged the woman she became. They illuminate Gregory's decision to leave *The Dial* at the height of the magazine's and Gregory's influence, as well as her undiminished deep loyalty to Powys. It will examine her relation to Powys with Gamel Woolsey and finally touch on Gregory's life after Powys's death.

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Elmar Schenkel was born in 1953 in Westphalia and teaches English Literature at the University of Leipzig (he will be *emeritus* by the time of the conference). He has taught at Amherst/Mass., Konstanz, Tübingen, Freiburg, and has lectured in Russia, India, Taiwan and other countries. Elmar wrote his PhD on JCP (1983). He has also written books on 'British Poetry and the Sense of Place', biographies of H.G. Wells and Conrad, and a study of Tolkien. He has written on the subject of 'Literature and Bicycles' and is the author of novels, essays and travel books as well as poetry. Elmar has contributed articles on JCP to German-language periodicals such as *Akzente* and *Fluscharge* as well as to *la lettre powysienne* and to the *Powys Review* ('JCP: The Literary Reception in Germany' [PR.4, 1978/1979]), 'A Sense of Connectedness: Hugo Kukulhaus and John Cowper Powys' [PR No.11, 1982/1983], 'From Powys to Pooh: Some Versions of Taoism in British and American Literature' [PR Nos. 31 & 32]), and to the *Powys Society Newsletter*, ('Taking Tea with Nietzsche's Sister: John Cowper Powys in Weimar and Saxony' [PSN No. 22, July 1994]). Elmar Schenkel is currently a Warden of the Nietzsche birthplace Museum in Röcken. Elmar's talk will connect biographical and literary/philosophical observations on JCP's relationship with Nietzsche. Powys was one of the few thinkers/writers during

WWI to keep his faith for Nietzsche trying to protect his philosophical thoughts from either German nationalists such as his sister Elisabeth or from the allies who tried to blame the war on Nietzsche. Though JCP had visited Elisabeth in Weimar a few years before the war he had a keen sense of ideological abuse. Elmar Schenkel will also speak about his work as a warden at Nietzsche's birthplace and tomb near Leipzig and about the reception of Nietzsche in the world, in order to provide a setting for Powys's particular response.

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Chris Campbell is a Senior Lecturer in Global Literatures at the University of Exeter. Dr Campbell's research focuses on the intersections of world literature, postcolonial theory and environmental criticism. He is particularly interested in Caribbean literature and culture, world-ecology and postcolonial ecocriticism, and histories of broadcast culture and empire. He is currently developing a collaborative project – *Commodity Fictions: World Ecology and World Literature in the 'long' Twentieth Century* – that focuses on the period 1890 to the present and uses the world-ecological perspective as basis for a new form of literary comparativism. The project examines literary responses to the forms of environment-making through which a selection of key commodity frontiers (including sugar, cacao, coal, tin, stone and gold) have developed across the globe. Dr Campbell has published articles in the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, *Green Letters* and *New Formations* and contributed chapters to collections in the fields of world literature, ecocriticism and postcolonial studies. He has co-edited two collections on Caribbean literature and the environment: *'What is the Earthly Paradise?': Eco-critical Response to the Caribbean* (Cambridge Scholars, 2007) with Erin Somerville and, with Mike Niblett, *The Caribbean: Aesthetics, World-Ecology, Politics* (Liverpool University Press, 2016). Taking as his starting point the image and representation of limestone in the works of two twentieth century global literary giants, Dr Campbell will offer a cross-cultural reading of the prose of John Cowper Powys and the poetry of Kamau Brathwaite. He will consider how processes of stone quarrying and digging the earth contribute to the cultural imaginaries of each author as they piece together an archaeology of historical memory. Dr Campbell suggests that a comparative world-literary approach can make the case for reading the modernist aesthetics of Powys together with the poetic innovations of Brathwaite to more fully account for the lived experiences of limestone landscapes both in the Caribbean archipelago and in the west country of England.

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Goulven le Brech was born in 1977. He studied philosophy at university and earned an MA in archival management. He is head archivist at the School of Advanced

Studies in the Social Sciences. He is a specialist in the study of the French philosopher Jules Lequier (1814-1862). Goulven has co-authored a book, with Patrick Hamelin, about JCP entitled *Une Philosophie de la Vie, les Perseides*, 2012, and is the author of an article ‘Two Great Adventurers of the Mind’, in *la lettre powysienne*, No.28, Autumn 2014. In the years 1920, right after the publication of his first philosophical book *The Complex Vision*, John Cowper Powys published several essays in the *Little Blue Books: The Art of Happiness, The Secret of Self Development and The Art of Forgetting the Unpleasant*. Those short essays present his ‘philosophy of life’ as it will be developed later in bigger essays such as *In Defense of Sensuality*. In his talk Goulven will ask these fundamental questions: why did JCP feel the need to propose a practical philosophy at this time from the point of view of his personal life and from the point of view of the state of the world and the society in which he lived? What role did Emanuel Julius Haldeman, the publisher of the *Little Blue Books*, play in this moment of his work? What were John Cowper Powys’s expectations of the *Little Blue Books*?

*

David Goodway was a founder member of the Powys Society in 1969 and the first vice-chair, a position he again occupies (for the third time). A historian, from 1969 he taught mainly adult students at the University of Leeds until it closed its School of Continuing Education in 2005. *His books include Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow, Left Libertarian Thought and British Writers from William Morris to Colin Ward* (2nd edition, 2012), with two chapters devoted to John Cowper Powys, and an edition of the correspondence between J.C. Powys and Emma Goldman (2008). David presented a talk at the 2017 Powys Society Conference in 2017 entitled: ‘Gerald Brenan (1894-1987, Bloomsbury, Gamel Woolsey and Spain’, published in the Powys Journal, Vol. XXVIII, 2018 and contributed a review of *A New Type of History: Fictional Proposals for Dealing with the Past* by Beverley Southgate, in *The Powys Journal*, Vol. XXVIII, 2018.

*

Richard Perceval Graves was Chairman of the Powys Society between 2001 and 2005. He is the nephew of poet and novelist, Robert Graves and is the financial director of a media company called GWS Media based in Bristol. Richard is a freelance lecturer and the author of biographies of T.E. Lawrence (1976), A.E. Housman (1979), the Powys Brothers (1983 [now available as an e-book]), Robert Graves (1986-1995) and Richard Hughes (1994).

Judy Dewsbury
John Francis Cowper Powys
26 August 1939 - 16 May 2018

Judy Dewsbury owns and runs an artist's community in Hastings called 'The Beacon' where she has lived since 1992. John's widow, Amanda, says that Judy's tribute captures John almost exactly. She adds a Powysian gloss: I think John was passionate about the need for people to be allowed to be free to be themselves. Judy Dewsbury organised a display of memorabilia, illustrating John's life, at the annual garden party of 'The Beacon' in 2018. Morine Krissdóttir contributed a tribute to John Powys in Newsletter 94, July 2018, pp.13-14. NB John's birth was registered in the first quarter of 1940 because of the outbreak of war. Amanda told me It was a family joke that John was born and war declared shortly afterwards.

Chris Thomas

*

St Mary's Terrace resident of long standing, and founding member of the St. Mary's Terrace Preservation Society, John Powys of 6,7 and 8 St Mary's Terrace (or 'the Little Shop') died on 16th May this year (2018) at home, after being ill for some time.

John's family included eminent early 20th century writers (John Cowper, Theodore and Llewelyn Powys) and artists. John's interests and activities were many and varied and included jazz, history, cats (!), photography, railways, engines and more. He was also a collector, a saver of documents and newspaper clippings.

After attending the Grammar School just down the road (the story goes that he was always late because he lived so near) John trained in librarian studies at Brighton Poly; he was branch librarian at Hastings when he married fellow librarian Amanda in 1967. Apparently John had to appeal to his union (NALGO) to be allowed to keep his beard when working in Hastings library.

Amanda describes John as always being a rebel – he wore a suit only twice in his life, one of the times being for his wedding. Their garden contained at one time a winnowing machine, a butter churn and a tractor.



John was knowledgeable and active. Apart from being on the St Mary's Terrace Preservation Society committee (he was never off it!) he was a mine of information about the locality, helped somewhat by his research duties at the library. He was the person to be consulted about recent events – landslip of '72, the old Manor House school – and could often provide relevant articles and documents. He photographed the enormous changes to the Old Town in the late 1960s when the hovels were pulled down to make way for the Bourne; he bought part of the quarry below the terrace to stop any ideas of development down there. He was active in saving a Tressell mural, now in Hastings museum, and more.

John lived 'above the shop' from 1950 to 2018 in a line of (eventually) three horizontally joined houses. His son, William, has the information behind the evolution of their home, which it is hoped he will write down one day. The shop, once 'The Little Brown Jug', an ale house, in the early 1900s, sometime tea rooms, was by 1952 The Powys Bookshop. The bookshop transferred to George Street ten years later. By 1992 when I moved here with my family the shop was a focus of interest when walking in the terrace, with John's window display always containing amusing items from his vast collection of ephemera. Even this week a visitor to the Beacon said she remembered the shop window on one of her visits to St Mary's Terrace as a child.

Chris Thomas

JCP, the Horse's Head, and John Francis Cowper Powys

In an e-mail message Amanda Powys informed me that: *JCP's christening present to John was a wonderful fairground horse's head which is adored & is still in our front room... John told me that he thought that the head was a fairground horse's head and had come originally from America, but I am not 100 per cent sure of that fact [or that it] had been found in the sea. John had the horse's missing ear made later.*

Mandy subsequently exchanged e-mails with Morine Krissdóttir about this gift and asked her if she could locate any reference in JCP's diaries to a present to John of a fairground horse's head. Morine responded: *Alas nothing... If John Francis was sent a present it would have been Phyllis who did so. I have found a few references to Francis and Mea [Francis's wife later known as Sally]. JCP had a soft spot for her...*

Friday 30th June, 1939: The Meeting in Caxton Hall & the party afterwards in Lyon's Café. Up at 8.30 after Francis had come into their Sitting Room (where I slept in luxury on their couch by the tall french windows with cool airs coming in from the top and the view of trees & foxgloves & Virginia Stocks & the sound of Wood pigeons & all around me these new little gardens) to say good bye! Oh the sense (*sic*)

of Roses! incredible big roses! roses! Petts Wood is a garden of Roses! How healthy how kind how like the Babes in the Wood Francis & Mea were! I only pray her child will be born happily and all right. Francis wants a girl. She wants a Boy. Mea took me for a walk

31 August, 1939: A letter from MEA describes the birth of John Francis Cowper Powys at 7.40 a.m. on Saturday August 26th. This is nature's retort to the prospective slaughter of the human race....another Head appears & forces its way into the world to offset the "powerless Heads of the dead". Mea's story makes Francis a real hero. He had to do all!

16 September, 1939: I saw the baby Ceirwyn of the "Home" yesterday like a young Dalai Lama Gargantua he is! I fancy my Great Nephew John Francis of Pett's Wood is the same! These Babies are the Defiance the Best by far Defiance of the War of the War of the War....Not to make you hate the enemy let us think of Babies but to restore our confidence, not in God, but in Nature here retorting to Man's Destructive Science!

24 July, 1940: A characteristic letter from Mea about Francis' thinking of taking up the Army as a profession, getting a Commission & staying in it after the war. He's the 1st person I've ever heard of with such an aim at this juncture. What a Commentary on his present job!

24 November 1940: The T.T. suggested our asking Mea my niece with her 1 year old John Francis to take a room in this vicinity if Francis is called up as he is bound soon to be but on second thoughts I wish I had not alluded to this suggestion (too quick from impulse) to Littleton for to be entirely responsible in a strange district for Theodore's grand-son makes me feel nervous. "The Spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak"

2 September, 1943: Had a lovely letter this Morn from MEA who has learnt to Milk Cows at Mappowder and does it at Leigh in Kent now watched by John & Anne Francis's children.



News and Notes

From Mike Taylor:

Mike Taylor has a selection of books by and about the Powyses which he is offering for sale to members. The full list of books may be found at the end of this Newsletter. Please contact Mike for more information at mike.taylor2019@outlook.com

The TLS

Timothy Hyman's review of the huge exhibition of the paintings of Pieter Bruegel the Elder at the Kunsthistorisches museum in Vienna appeared in the *TLS* issue for 4 December 2018. The exhibition closed in January 2019. Tim's review was followed in the same issue of the *TLS* by a review by Michael Caines of a biographical study, by Powys Society committee member **Paul Cheshire**, of the romantic poet and Hermeticist William Gilbert, *William Gilbert and Esoteric Romanticism* (Liverpool University Press, 2018).

From Robert Caserio, Professor Emeritus, Penn State College of Liberal Arts:

The November 2018 issue of *modernism/Modernity* includes an excellent essay on TFP by **Chris Danta**, Associate Professor of English at the University of New South Wales, Sydney, entitled: 'The Theology of Personification: Allegory and Nonhuman Agency in the Work of **T.F.Powys**.'

From John Hodgson:

I am reading *Where the Heart Beats – John Cage, Zen Buddhism, and the Inner Life of Artists*, by Kay Larson, and have come across an interesting reference to **Marian Powys** (p 375 of the Penguin edition). In the late 1950s, Cage wrote little stories, all designed to be read aloud in one minute. I think Cage catches Marian's voice in this little story:

Elizabeth, it is a beautiful day. Let us take a walk. Perhaps we will find some mushrooms. If we do, we shall pluck them and eat them." Betsy Zogbaum asked Marian Powys Grey whether she knew the difference between mushrooms and toadstools. "I think I do. But consider, my dear, how dull life would be without a little uncertainty in it."

CT adds: There is a link between **John Cage** and the circle of anarchist sympathisers that JCP associated with in California in the 1920s. John Cage was briefly in love with Pauline Schindler (wife of the architect Rudolf Schindler who designed the sets for a Californian production, by Reginald Pole, of JCP's play *The Idiot*). In the late 1930s Cage secured work at the Cornish School of the Arts in Seattle where JCP's friend Maurice Browne had also worked. Could this story by Cage reflect a memory of something he had heard from the Schindlers or Nelly Cornish about the Powyses? Or perhaps Cage met Marian when he lived in New York in the 1940s.

From Charles Lock:

Bill Keith has bequeathed his Powys Collection to the Thomas Fisher Rare Books Library at the University of Toronto.

Adam Mars Jones, novelist and literary critic, made two references to *A Glastonbury Romance* in *The London Review of Books*, 8 November 2018, in an article called ‘Big Books’. He recorded an anecdote about artist **David Nash** and Phyllis Playter: *There are plenty of readers who enjoy a long book, but no one wants a big book as such. When in the 1960s the artist David Nash bought a chapel in Blaenau Ffestiniog, at the time the cheapest place in Britain to buy property, he befriended Phyllis Playter, who had lived there with John Cowper Powys. Her attempts to get him to read A Glastonbury Romance culminated in her taking a kitchen knife and cutting a copy into handy jacket-pocket sized chunks. A mutilated book is closer to wholeness, as long as it has a reader, than an undamaged one that never leaves the bookshelves.* [For more information about Phyllis and David Nash see my note in *NL* 87, March 2016, p.28, *When David Met Phyllis*. CT].

I was in London in October 2018, summoned at very short notice to speak at the first night of **James Purdy’s** *The Paradise Circus* at the Playground Theatre. This was not only (as I had supposed) the first production of a Purdy play in London; it was the first production of any play by Purdy ever undertaken by a professional theatre anywhere. I spoke before the play, explaining the English connections to JCP and Edith Sitwell, while thinking how hard it is to promote one neglected writer by invoking the admiration of another hardly less neglected. After the performance I would have voiced my views in even stronger terms. (Very few in the audience were there because they knew of Purdy; not a single one had so much as heard of JCP.) I had read the play three times but was quite unprepared for what the production made of the script, though doing so without – on fourth reading – in any way betraying or falsifying the text. It is a magnificent piece of theatre, recommended to all – and particularly to those curious about JCP’s admiration for Purdy.

CT adds: *The Paradise Circus* was performed at the Playground Theatre, Latimer Road in West London near White City in October and November 2018 and included post-performance talks about the work of James Purdy by Richard Canning (Professor of British and American literature, University of Northampton) and the American actor and director John Uecker. The correspondence between JCP and James Purdy was published in *Powys Journal*, vol. XXVI, 2016. An article about James Purdy by Richard Canning, who also mentions JCP, appeared in the *TLS*, 26 October 2018.

From Chris Thomas:

The UK Government plans to nominate the **slate quarries** of North Wales as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, including the quarries of Blaenau Ffestiniog near JCP’s last home. A decision about Blaenau’s UNESCO world heritage status is due to be made in 2021.



*Abandoned slate quarry
near Blaenau Ffestiniog*

From Susan Rands:

In *The Red Earl, the Extraordinary Life of the 16th Earl of Huntingdon* (Bloomsbury, 2014), Selina Hastings, the acclaimed biographer of Evelyn Waugh (1994) and Nancy Mitford (1985), mentions how her father, the Red Earl, Jack Hastings as he was usually known, met **Charles Erskine Scott Wood** and his wife, Sara Bard Field, (close friends of JCP and Llewelyn) whilst he was in California in 1930 and often visited their home, Los Gatos (The Cats), in San Francisco. Hastings had left England in 1929, abandoning his heritage and inheritance, to travel to Australia and the South Seas where he pursued his interest in painting. In California he became the assistant of the famous anarchist and muralist Diego Rivera. Hastings also travelled the length and breadth of the USA with his first wife, Cristina Casati, and gave good descriptions of the poverty and upheaval of the country leading up to the Wall Street crash.

CT adds: Selina Hastings notes that it was probably through Erskine Scott Wood that her father met the Californian poet **Robinson Jeffers** and his wife Una, whom he visited at their home, Tor House, in Carmel. Although JCP was critical of Jeffers's poetry, he recognised an affinity in their shared feeling for the natural world. JCP certainly seems to have appreciated Jeffers's descriptions of the California coastal landscape which he no doubt also discussed with his friend, another great California poet, George Sterling. Robert Hamburger, in his biography of Erskine Scott Wood, *Two Rooms*, says that it was in fact Llewelyn and George Sterling who together encouraged Erskine Scott Wood to visit Jeffers in Carmel. In a letter to Ichiro Hara (24 March 1954), JCP declared *Yes I have long long ago I think read Robinson Jeffers' works about that Pacific Coast of California & the wild passions of its excitable farmers and ranch-men...*

From Dawn Collins:

Inscription found by **Michael Holliday** in a copy of *AGR: Please do not read this book. It is the Bible of a heretic: it will claim your heart and strangle your spirit.*

Note by MH: My introduction to JCP; with such an inscription I had to buy it. *AGR*, together with *Autobiography* formed the basis of my D. Phil thesis, 'Between Modernism and Tradition, the problem of Powys' (Birmingham university, 2002).

Michael Holliday is the author of a booklet 'Making It New' in Cecil Woolf's 'Powys Heritage' series.

Richard Comben

Notice of the death of Richard has just been received. Richard was a regular at conferences for several years but latterly he was prevented from attending due to illness. He contributed notes on Stephen Fry and E.M. Forster to *Newsletters* 86, p.39 and 87, p.15. Richard has generously bequeathed his fine collection of Powys books to the Powys Society.

* * *

Anthony Head

Photographs of Llewelyn – Mysteries of a Powys Confusion

I was greatly interested by Chris Thomas' article in the November *Newsletter* (No. 95) about the two photographs of Llewelyn Powys by Jessie Tarbox Beals that had been found by Dawn Collins on what must have been the website of the New York Historical Society (the Museum of the City of New York appears to have no Powys photos at all). I had never before seen the studio portrait reproduced on Page 40, but I have a fine print of the cover photo of Llewelyn sitting in his room (indeed in Patchin Place) that I purchased back in 1993 from the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe College, which has a large archive of Beals' papers and photos donated by her daughter Nanette. Beals was a pioneering and well-known photographer in her day and much can be found about her now on the Internet.

But the article sent me back to look at my own correspondence with the Schlesinger Library at that time, and I thought I might share some of this. I had inquired in July 1993 whether Radcliffe had any holdings of letters, manuscripts or photographs of John Cowper Powys and had been told they had one letter from JCP (to a Mr. Kerridge, dated 24 Jan. 1936) and one photo of him. My request to purchase the photo was forwarded to the Photograph and Exhibits Coordinator, Marie-Hélène Gold, who replied in September that they actually had *two* portraits of JCP. She enclosed photocopies of both of them so that I could decide which one should be printed for me to purchase.

I was intrigued to discover that these two photos were in fact that one of Llewelyn sitting in his room in Patchin Place and another of him on the steps outside obviously taken the same day. (This latter was reproduced in 2002 in the Powys Heritage booklet No. 7, *We Lived in Patchin Place* by Boyne Grainger.)

Let me quote from my next letter from Marie-Hélène, dated October 13:

Dear Mr. Head,

Thank you for your letter of October 1st and the very interesting information it contained about the Powys photographs. Would you be so kind as to send me a photocopy of a portrait of Llewelyn Powys if you have one? Did the two brothers look very much alike? The reason why I am asking you this favor is that the portrait of the man seated next to a window was identified on the back by Jessie Tarbox Beals as being of John. Forgive me for sounding so distrustful but I want to make absolutely sure that Beals was wrong on this as she sometimes was on such matters. She was an extremely busy photographer during the first three decades of this century and she very likely wrote information and captions on the back of many of her photographs long after she had shot them.

I cannot recall what photos I sent, but I quote again from Marie-Hélène's response, dated November 2:

Dear Mr. Head,

Thank you so very much for your reply of October 22 and for the wonderful visual material it contained about Llewelyn and John Cowper Powys. Your photographs are irrefutable evidence and all I can do now is to make the necessary corrections in my various inventories, log books and catalogue cards.

I am sorry to report that in our collection of photographs by Jessie Tarbox Beals there is no portrait even remotely resembling the ones you sent me of JCP. We do not have the entire body of Beals's work, however.

She then went on to say:

In my letter of September 20 I told you we had two portraits of (L.) Powys in the Beals collection. I did not mention that we had in fact a third one, also by Beals, because I assumed you wanted a formal portrait and that particular photograph did not qualify as one. I wish I had been less literal and more thorough. I am enclosing a photocopy of it. Is the woman Alyse Gregory? I would be very grateful for the information especially since you indicated that she was very active in the suffrage movement.

This third photo was of Llewelyn and Alyse together on the steps outside in Patchin Place [see back cover], and again obviously taken the same day. In her last letter to me, dated November 22, Marie-Hélène wrote:

Dear Mr. Head,

Thank you very much for your letter of November 9. I am delighted that although I did not have what you originally wanted, I could provide you with something you

did not expect. The date you are giving me for the Alyse Gregory photograph will help me give a more precise dating to some other Beals photographs of Greenwich Village. ... I can only say that I regret that your request has come to an end. Not all of the requests that I receive lead to such a pleasant exchange of letters.

I trust I echoed Marie-Hélène's sentiments in my reply. It was indeed a delightful exchange and characteristic of the helpfulness and warmth of many of the archivists I had contact with in the United States. I am not sure what date I suggested for these photographs, but the parameters could only have been those that Chris gives in his article: sometime in 1922-1924 or between November 1927 and April 1928.

I subsequently purchased prints of all three photographs from the Schlesinger Library – and it intrigues me further now to discover that they are all, in fact, also in the collection at the New York Historical Society (NYHS), on whose website Dawn found the two highlighted in the November *Newsletter*. They are listed there as c.1905-1940. I have written to the NYHS to give them the more precise parameters and to see if they have any further information on the studio portrait, which is not in the Schlesinger Library collection.

Beals had written 'John Cooper Powys' on the back of the photo of Llewelyn sitting in Patchin Place, but it remains a mystery whether she ever did take a photograph of JCP, and if so where it may be (though obviously not at the Schlesinger Library). Did she *know* that she had actually taken one of him, or did she just confuse him with Llewelyn when she wrote his name on that print, John perhaps being the more well-known of the two?

I have had no response from the NYHS about the studio portrait of Llewelyn, so can only guess as to when it was taken. It was probably not taken on the same day as the other three photographs. Although it is not easy to see in the *Newsletter* reproductions, the photos on the NYHS website reveal that Llewelyn is wearing a different shirt (a striped one, in fact) and a different bow-tie, has a differently shaded flower in his button-hole, and is wearing a ring on the little finger of his left hand, whereas he appears not to be in the sitting-room photo. But my guess is that it would have been around the same time, and I think all these photos must have been taken when he was 'visiting critic' for the *New York Herald Tribune* in 1927 or 1928 – the portrait perhaps for publicity purposes – as Llewelyn seems to me to be nearer 43-44 than 38-40. Also, given that he and Alyse would still have been unmarried during their earlier residence in Patchin Place, would they have wanted to be publically photographed together at that point, the nonchalance of 'Bohemian' Village life notwithstanding? I think it more likely that they were the respectable 'Mr & Mrs' returning to old haunts. But that is just a surmise.

Henry James (1843-1916)

A Description of Glastonbury

‘We departed by train for Glastonbury, viewed the ruins of the fine old Abbey...’

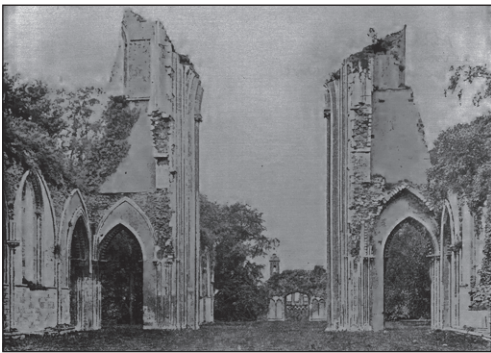
(letter by Henry James to his parents 19 June 1872)

This extract is taken from a series of articles by Henry James about his travels, with his sister Alice, in England in 1872, entitled ‘A Summer in Europe’, first published in Part IV of ‘Wells and Salisbury’ in The Nation, 22 August 1872. The article was reprinted in English Hours (1905).

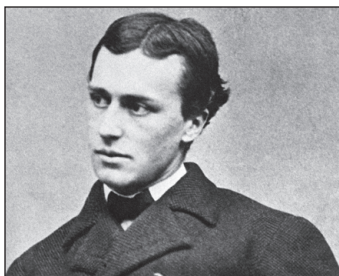
The continuity of tradition is not altogether broken, however, for the little street of Glastonbury has rather an old-time aspect, and one of the houses at least must have seen the last of the abbots ride abroad on his mule. The little inn is a capital bit of character, and as I waited for the ‘bus under its low dark archway (in something of the mood, possibly, in which a train was once waited for at Coventry), and watched the barmaid flirting her way to and fro out of the heavy-browed kitchen and among the lounging young appraisers of colts and steers and barmaids, I might have imagined that the Merry England of the Tudors had not utterly passed away. A beautiful England this must have been as well, if it contained many such abbeys as Glastonbury. Such of the ruined columns and portals and windows as still remain are of admirable design and finish. The doorways are rich in marginal ornament – ornament within ornament as it often is; for the dainty weeds and wild flowers overlace the antique tracery with their bright arabesques and deepen the grey of the stone work as it brightens their bloom. The thousand flowers which grow among English ruins deserve a chapter to themselves. I owe them, as an observer, a heavy debt of satisfaction, but I am too little of a botanist to pay them in their own coin.

It has often seemed to me in England that the purest enjoyment of architecture was to be had among the ruins of great buildings. In the perfect building one is rarely sure that the impression is simply architectural: it is more or less pictorial and romantic; it depends partly upon association and partly upon various accessories and details

which, however they may be wrought into harmony with the architectural idea, are not part of its essence and spirit. But in so far as beauty of structure is beauty of line and curve, balance and harmony of masses and dimensions, I have seldom relished it as deeply as on the grassy nave of some crumbling church, before lonely columns and empty windows where the wild flowers were a cornice and the sailing clouds a



Glastonbury Abbey



roof. The arts certainly hang together in what they do for us. These hoary relics of Glastonbury reminded me in their broken eloquence of one of the other great ruins of the world – the Last Supper of Leonardo. A beautiful shadow, in each case, is all that remains; but that shadow is the soul of the artist.

The Young Master – Henry James c. 1861/63

John Cowper Powys on Henry James

Some more jottings from one of Mr Powys's lectures:

The Little Review, April 1915

We do not know precisely who made these 'jottings' of one of JCP's lectures on Henry James. It might have been the same anonymous reader who transcribed JCP's lecture on Dostoevsky, published in The Little Review in February 1915. But it might also have been Margaret Anderson (1886-1973), founder of The Little Review in Chicago in March 1914. She was a firm admirer of JCP's work (he represented to her the idea of artistic genius) and she consistently championed his performances in the pages of her magazine: ...this man whose methods spoil one for almost all other lectures. Mr Powys's intellect has that emotional character which is likely to be the quality of the man of genius rather than the man of talent. He might be called the arch-appreciator: he relies upon the inspiration of the moment, and when violently enthusiastic or violently the reverse (he is usually one of the two) he never stops with less than ten superbly chosen adjectives to express his emotion exactly. (The Little Review, January 1915).

JCP lectured on Henry James as well as on Dostoevsky, Wilde, Milton, Lamb, Hardy, Dante, Rabelais, Hugo, Verlaine, Goethe and Heine at the Chicago Little Theatre in January and February 1915. These lectures, which we do know were attended by Margaret Anderson, were also reviewed by the Russian scholar and friend of Emma Goldman, Alexander Kaun (1889-1944) in The Little Review, February 1915: I have become enriched now with another moment of rare beatitude, of indelible radiance. I was present at the transubstantiation of Oscar Wilde performed by John Cowper Powys. Was it a lecture?...What a dwarfish misnomer for the solemn rite that took place in the dark temple, the "catacomb" of the Little theatre! I close my eyes and see once more the galvanised demi-god vibrating in the green light, invoking the Uranian Oscar. We, the worshippers, sit entranced, hypnotised, demundanized, bewitched...

This transcription of JCP's lecture on Henry James was reprinted in The Little Review Anthology (1953)

Chris Thomas

*

Henry James is a revealer of secrets, but never does he entirely draw the veil. He has the most reluctance, the most reverence of all the great novelists. He is always reluctant to draw the last veil. This great plump-handed moribund figure, waits – afraid. All of his work is a mirror – never a softening or blurring of outlines, but a medium through which one sees the world as he sees it. In reading his works one never forgets the author. All his people speak in his character. All is attuned to his tone from beginning to end.

He uses slang with a curious kind of condescension – all kinds of slang – with a tacit implicit apology to the reader. So fine a spirit – he is not at home with slang.

His work divides itself into three periods – best known between 1900 and 1903. In reading him approximate 1900 as the climatic period.

His character delineation is superb. Ralph in *The Portrait of a Lady*, is the type of those who have difficulty in asserting themselves and are in a peculiar way hurt by contact with the world. Osborne – in the same book – is one of those peculiarly hard, selfish, artistic, super-refined people who turn into ice whatever they touch. He personifies the cruelty of a certain type of egoism – the immorality of laying a dead hand upon life. Poe has that tendency to lay a dead hand upon what he cares for and stop it from changing. Who of us with artistic sensibilities is not afflicted with this immorality? This is the unpardonable sin – more than lust – more than passion – “necrophilism”, to lay the dead hand of eternal possession upon a young head.

Nothing exists but civilisation for H.J. There has been no such writer since Vergil. And for him (H.J.) there is but one civilisation – European. He is the cosmopolitan novelist. He describes Paris as no Frenchman does! Not only Paris, but America, Italy, anywhere the reader falls into a delicious passivity to the synthesis of nations. He knows them all and is at home in all. He is the novelist of society. Society – which is the one great outrage: it is not pain – it is not pity; it is society which is the outrage upon personality, the permanent insult, the punishment to life. As ordinary people we hate it often – as philosophers and artists we are bitter against it, as hermits we are simply on the rack. But it is through their little convention – allies – that H.J. discovers people, human beings, in society. He uses these conventionalities to portray his characters. He hears paeans of liberation, hells of pity and sorrow and distress as people signal to one another across these little conventionalities. He fills the social atmosphere with rumours and whispers of people toward one another.

In describing city and country he is equally great. He does not paint with words, but simply transports you there. Read *The Ambassadors* for French scenery! Everything is treated sacramentally. He is the Walter Pater of novelists with an Epicurean sense for little things – little things that happen every day.

There is another element in his work that is psychic and beyond – magnetic and beyond. His people are held together by its vibrations. Read the *Two Magics*.

H.J. is the apostle to the rich. Money! that accursed thing! He understands its

importance. It lends itself in every direction to the tragedy of being. He understands the art of the kind of life in which one can do what one wants. He understands the rich American gentleman in Europe – The Reverberator.

In *The Two Hemispheres* we find a unique type of woman – a lady from the top of her shining head to the tips of her little feet – exquisite and yet an adventuress.

This noble, distinguished, massive intelligence is extraordinarily refined and yet has a mania for reality. He risks the verge of vulgarity and never falls into it. He redeems the commonplace.

To appreciate the *mise en scène* of his books – his description of homes – read *The Great Good Place*. He has a profound bitterness for stupid people. He understands amorous, vampirish women who destroy a man's work. Go to H.J. for artist characters – for the baffled atrophied artists who have souls but will never do anything. Read *The Tragic Muse*. Note the character of Gabriel Nash, who is Whistler, Oscar, Pater all together and something added – the arch ghost – the moth of the cult of art.

The countenance of H.J. says that he might have been the cruelest and is the tenderest of human beings. To him no one is so poor, so unwanted a spirit but could fill a place that archangels might strive for. James is a Sennacherib of Assyria, a Solomon, a pasha before whom ivory-headed vassals prostrate themselves. He is the Solomon to whom many Queens of Sheba have come and been rejected, the lover of chastity, of purity in the natural state.

He is difficult to read, this grand, massive, unflinching, old realist, because of his intellect – a distinguished, tender, subtle spirit like a plant. And in the end I sometimes wonder whether H.J. himself in imagination does not stroll beyond the garden gate up the little hill and over to the churchyard where, under the dark earth, he knows that the changing lineaments mold themselves into the sardonic grin of humanity.

Chris Thomas

***The Master-Wizard's Wand:
JCP and Henry James***

I was conjured & spellbound and ensorcerized by Henry James into staying up until 12.30am...Thus do we hang on the Master-Wizard's Wand. This felicitous reference to the work of Henry James, which JCP recorded in his diary [1], neatly encapsulates his admiration and love for one of his favourite novelists. In another entry in his diary JCP refers to James's *long, convoluted sentences* [2], and, in a letter to Louis Wilkinson, dated 14 April 1946, he refers to *that great novelist (I would almost put him equal with Hardy...)* Henry James [3]. JCP, of course, also expressed this admiration at much more length and in greater detail elsewhere in, for instance, his early lectures on representative American writers, in the *Little Review* [4] (see transcription in this *Newsletter*), in *One hundred Best Books* (1916), and in *Suspended Judgements* (1916). He also refers to the 'art' of Henry

James many times in his letters as well as in the *Autobiography*, and occasionally in *The Pleasures of Literature*. In later years Phyllis and JCP enjoyed reading the novels of Henry James together. JCP acquired a complete set of James's collected works as a gift for Phyllis [5].

But JCP and Henry James were two very different novelists. Henry James was a very self-conscious writer dedicated to refining the 'art' of the novel (JCP called him an *intellectual* writer) [6]. He reviewed and revised his work and later produced long and detailed prefaces [7] explaining the sources of his work, the motivations of his characters, as well as the complexities of plot, commenting on the writer's point of view and his understanding of the creative process. JCP, on the other hand, thought of himself as inartistic, as a *hollow reed* and a medium for the ideas and inspirations that came to him, as though unbidden, through his deeper self: *I feel a wind pouring through my spirit and mind* [8]. It is noteworthy that when JCP referred in his diary to Henry James, the Master Wizard, he had in fact just been reading *The Tragic Muse*. He was probably reading the revised New York edition of this novel, published in 1908 (the New York edition of the collected novels of Henry James was published between 1907 and 1909). The 1908 edition of *The Tragic Muse* includes James's Preface with its now famous, and erroneous,



Henry James - drawing by John Singer Sargent, the
Yellow Book, July 1894

condemnation of certain 19th century novels by Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Thackeray and Dumas as *large, loose baggy monsters* [9]. James deplores the major novels of these authors for their lack of form and structure. No doubt if James had read JCP's novels he would have said the same things about his work. JCP of course loved to write baggy novels! On the other hand when Isobel Archer, in *The Portrait of a Lady*, thinks of Casper Goodwood as lacking an *easy consonance with the deeper rhythms of life* he would have found here an affinity with his own insights into the human psyche. Moreover when James also states *I delight in a deep breathing economy of an organic form* [10] which, George Steiner thinks, suggests a quality of *aliveness*, JCP might have applauded the sentiment for its closeness to his own vision of the world and approach to writing 'romances'.

JCP and Henry James shared a great love of classical antiquity and antique sculpture. The novels of Henry James are suffused with his appreciation of ancient art: *There are things in Rome which are very, very beautiful. Which things have most beauty? I should say the antique sculpture* [11]. JCP's work is spread throughout with allusions to ancient Greek and Roman culture. But did JCP and Henry James perhaps also share, specifically, an interest in a particular object of late classical and early Hellenistic art? In the late 1890s, when JCP was still living at Court House, near Lewes, in East Sussex, he used to visit the wealthy connoisseur and collector of classical antiquities, Ned Warren (1860-1928) from whom he also used to borrow books [12]. On one of JCP's visits to Warren's establishment at Lewes House he may have observed a beautiful Parian marble head of a statue of Aphrodite which Warren had acquired in 1898 and which he attributed to the Greek sculptor Praxiteles [13]. In 1904/1905 Henry James made a tour of places in America including Boston's Museum of Fine Arts where he encountered the same antique object that had once resided in Lewes (Ned Warren donated the head to the museum in 1900) and was moved to write a description: *a certain little dim eyed head of Aphrodite...quite worth the Atlantic voyage to catch in the American light the very fact of the genius of Greece...as lonely a jewel as ever strayed out of its setting* [14].

JCP and Henry James also shared similarities in another way. Morine Krissdóttir notes that they were both exiles who built a strong relationship with their respective adoptive countries. Whenever he was in England James travelled widely, familiarised himself with English customs and habits, developed contacts amongst the English aristocracy and the upper class, and was invited into many English country houses [15]. *The Portrait of a Lady*, for instance, which JCP thought was a *great* novel [16], opens with a very English scene in which the characters take tea on the lawn of a country house called Gardencourt – *there are few hours in life more agreeable than the hour dedicated to the ceremony known as afternoon tea* – says Henry James in the very first sentence of the novel. This must have appealed to JCP as surely would the description James provides of Gardencourt itself [17]. The English country house and its customs are themes that James explores in many of his novels and short stories. He drew on his own personal experience and during his tours in England he visited many places familiar to JCP.

In 1872 James visited Glastonbury and Wells (see the extract in this *Newsletter* of his description of Glastonbury). In the summer of 1881 he visited Midelnay Place, Drayton, near Montacute in Somerset (the home of lawyer Edwin Brook Cely (1833-1914) and Kate Sedley Fearing Carter Trevillion: *very exquisite it was...it kept me a-dreaming all the while I was there. It seemed to me very old England; there was a peculiarly mellow and ancient feeling in it all...I think I have never been more penetrated – I have never more loved the land. It was the old houses that fetched me*. He also visited Montacute, “*the admirable*”, Barrington, Ford Abbey and several smaller houses and wrote about these places in terms JCP might well

have appreciated: *These delicious old houses, in the long August days, in the south of England air, in the soil over which so much has passed and out of which so much has come, rose before me like a series of visions...Such a house as Montacute, so perfect, with its grey personality, its old world gardens, its accumulations of expression, of tone – such a house is really, au fond, an ineffaceable image...*[18]

In 1905 Henry James toured England again to help some friends buy a country house and wrote about: *This absurd old England is still, after long years, so marvellous to me and the visitation of beautiful old buried houses...such a refinement of bliss* [19]. In 1906 Henry James encouraged his friend Edith Wharton to make a visit to England. He was already planning an itinerary: *I vote that we come southward through Kent and Sussex...and make our way so, by Winchester and Salisbury, into the interesting Somersetshire of old houses (Montacute the beautiful!!!) by Wells, on the way* [20].

JCP might well have found pleasure in the thought that these places, which he knew personally so well, had been touched by *the Master-Wizard's Wand*.

Notes

1. JCP diary, 27 December 1940. JCP may have started reading Henry James as early as the 1890s. He could, for instance, have read James's short story, *The Death of the Lion* which was published in the first issue of the *Yellow Book* in April 1894. The story, with its theme of the consequences of celebrity, fame, and literary success might have resonated with him particularly at a time when, as he says in *Autobiography*, he used to tell himself *stories about being a master-writer visited in my retreat by other master-writers* (*Autobiography*, Macdonald, 1967,p.203). JCP's use of the epithet, Master Wizard, for Henry James suggests he was familiar with references to the novelist as 'the Master' common by the end of the 19th century. Edith Wharton, for instance, perhaps influenced by James's story, *The Lesson of the Master* (1888), addressed him in her letters as 'dear Master'.
2. JCP diary, 10 August 1931
3. In a letter to Sven Erik Täckmark, 9 October 1938, JCP called Henry James *great and unequalled*. *The Letters of John Cowper Powys to Eric the Red*, 1983
4. April 1915
5. Letter to Louis Wilkinson, 3 November 1940. *The Letters of John Cowper Powys to Louis Wilkinson*, 1958
6. *One Hundred Best Books*
7. JCP's prefaces to the new editions of *Wolf Solent* and *A Glastonbury Romance* published by Macdonald are markedly different in tone and approach to the Prefaces of Henry James. JCP's approach is subjective, sceptical, speculative and tentative. He describes writing about *Wolf Solent* as if he is *writing a commentary on my whole life*; he declares that *Wolf Solent* is *a book of Nostalgia* and that attempting to write about *A Glastonbury Romance* is like *diving into risky and tricky waters*.
8. JCP diary 14 May 1933. A classic account of literary inspiration can be found in Nietzsche's description, in *Ecce Homo*, of the creation of *Also Sprach Zarathustra*.

Nietzsche describes, how, during the writing of the book, he fell into a state of ecstatic inspiration: *One hears, one does not seek; one accepts, one does not ask who gives...a thought suddenly flashes up like lightning...There is the feeling that one is utterly out of hand...everything happens quite involuntarily...This is my experience of inspiration.* JCP read *Ecce Homo* in its original English translation by Anthony M Ludovici.

9. Henry James, Preface to *The Tragic Muse*, revised edition, NY, 1908. See comments about this phrase in *The Sublime and the Giggly: On Iris Murdoch and John Cowper Powys*, by Charles Lock, *PJ*, Vol. XI, 2001, p.50 and *The Loose and Baggy Monsters of Henry James: Notes on the Underlying Classic Form in the Novel*, by R P Blackmur, *Accent*, XI, Summer 1951 (reprinted in *The Lion and the Honeycomb*, 1955). See also *The Critical Prefaces of Henry James* by R P Blackmur in *The Lion and the Honeycomb*; Henry James's New York edition, edited by David McWhirter, 1995; and *The Craft of Fiction* by Percy Lubbock, 1921.
10. Henry James, Preface to *The Tragic Muse*, 1908
11. *Roderick Hudson* by Henry James (1875)
12. JCP diary, 19 October 1932. Also see *John Cowper Powys, the Lyons and W.E. Lutyens* by Susan Rands, 2000, pp.12-13
13. The head, sometimes called 'the Bartlett head', is now assigned to an artist working under the influence of Praxiteles c330-300 BC. JCP dedicated a poem to 'the Hermes of Praxiteles' (Poems, 1899) and in *Autobiography* compared the figure of Frederick Rolfe to – *the Faun of Praxiteles*
14. *The American Scene* by Henry James, 1907. Although they never met each other in person the lives of Ned Warren and Henry did intersect at various stages. Henry James was acquainted with Warren's family in Boston during the 'Gilded Age' (see *The Mount Vernon Street Warrens* by Martin Green, 1987) and later in England Henry James purchased a Georgian house in Rye not far from Warren in Lewes.
15. Henry James referred to England's *lovely country houses* and to *the well appointed, well administered, well filled country house* (*An English New Year*, 1879)
16. *What a book!* JCP diary, 11 July 1934; *such a good book*, JCP diary, 19 July 1934
17. JCP might have had this description in mind when he referred to James's *sort of deep rich mellow golden flowing fusing into middle distances and further distances, saturating just as that golden sherry wine saturated that tipsy cake* (letter to Louis Wilkinson, 14 April 1946). There is a sense of JCP's shared affinity with Henry James in *Wolf Solent* where JCP describes Wolf's visit to Mr Malakite's shop: *There was a dainty tea table with an old fashioned urn, a silver tea pot, some cups and saucers of Dresden china, and a large plate of thin bread and butter.*
18. Written in NY at 115 East Street, December 20th 1881, *The Notebooks of Henry James*, ed by F O Matthiessen and Kenneth B Murdock, 1947.
19. Letter to Edith Wharton, 8 November, 1905, *Henry James Letters, Vol. IV, 1895-1916*, ed by Leon Edel, 1984
20. Letter to Edith Wharton, April 4th, 1906. *Henry James, Letters* ed by Leon Edel, volume IV, 1895-1916, 1984

Hampstead meeting, 2 December 2018

David Goodway

JCP's The Meaning of Culture (1929)

I haven't chosen to introduce *The Meaning of Culture* because I love it... I do consider it the most successful of JCP's 'philosophical' writings – and that his exposition of the life-technique is not only a great achievement in itself but also of exceptional importance to the conduct of life.

When I first read *The Meaning of Culture* (in 2003) I wrote the following personal note: 'Far from being fusty or fuddy-duddy, as its title suggests, it is not surprising that this book sold so well for it is a major, marvellously written work, revolutionary in its philosophy (or technique) of self-liberation'. Re-reading it last month I consider: 'It continues to read exceptionally well: Powys's prose is superb and his life-technique daring'.

Back in 2003 [see below] I commented further: 'Maybe purchasers were misled as it is immediately obvious that "culture" is the wrong word for what Powys explores – instead he should have used "creation" or "creativity" or "personal liberation"'. Now I go so far as to say: 'Yet the way in which he continually elides an accepted view of "culture" (literature etc) with his own conception of it as "self-creation" irks. What he is doing is using – or advocating – the use of culture in the first sense as one tool in the attainment of self-liberation'.

As the *Manchester Guardian* reviewer (1929) observed:

Here in a dozen chapters of eloquent and glowing prose, Mr. Powys describes for every reader that citadel which is himself and explains to him how it may be strengthened and upheld and on what terms it is most worth upholding.

This summarizes my own position very well.

JCP has a chapter on painting, which I find very unconvincing. He mentions music cursorily and architecture most belatedly. Of over-riding importance to him is literature: fiction, poetry, the essays of Montaigne and Lamb – as well as some philosophy (esp. Nietzsche).

JCP pointed out in 1939 that his first prose-work had been *The War and Culture* (1914). Here he had used 'culture' in a quite different way: as a body of ideas. The ideas that the belligerent powers exemplified had caused WW1 – and continued in conflict.

Contemporary discussion of culture now largely derives from Raymond Williams's hugely influential *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* (1958). Stemming from this was Williams's *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976), where he maintained:

Culture is one or the two or three most complicated words in the English language. This is so partly because of its intricate historical development, in several European languages, but mainly because it has now come to be used for important concepts in several distinct intellectual disciplines and in several and incompatible systems of thought' (76-7).

In the following five succinct pages of discussion, no such usage as Powys's appears. But the most relevant definition of culture for us must be Matthew Arnold's, *Culture and Anarchy* (1869):

a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters that most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world, and, through this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits, which we now follow staunchly but mechanically, vainly imagining that that there is a virtue in following them staunchly which makes up for the mischief of following them mechanically.

Although Arnold was one of JCP's most admired writers, that was as a poet. There is no explicit mention of *Culture and Anarchy* in *The Meaning of Culture*, not even a hint of Arnold's notion of culture.

So what does JCP offer instead?

A belief ... in the right of my own mind and the power of my own mind to re-create itself on lines selected by itself. This re-creation of the mind by itself is of the very essence of culture... [1]

The desirable effect upon one's mind of imaginative literature is not to strengthen one's memory or enlarge one's learning, or to inspire one to gather together a collection of passages from 'great authors'; it is to encourage one to learn the art of becoming a 'great author' oneself; not in the sense of composing a single line, but in the sense of sufficiently detaching oneself from the chaotic spectacle of reality so as to catch on the wing that fleeting loveliness of which no genius has the monopoly and which only the stirred depths of one's own deepest nature can prevail upon to pause in its eternal flight. [2]

After the talk I was pressed (by Dawn and Tim) on what I say in *Seeds* [*Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow*] [3] about JCP's life philosophy being a variety of anarchist individualism. And I threw out in conclusion that it seems also to be a form of existentialism (as expressed in the quotations above), wondering whether that is what appealed to the admiring group of French philosophers. I think it almost certainly was...

*

DG fully analyses JCP's life-philosophy in *Powys Journal* XIV (2004):

Powys was a 'reckless and daring thinker' and it was he, definitely not Dorothy Richardson [quoting JCP's Dorothy M. Richardson, 1931], who revealed a 'new gospel of the art of life' ... a whole new way of taking life' and developed 'a new philosophy of the senses, indeed a new philosophy of life.'

This he did in a series of publications from the 1920s to the 1950s: The Art of Happiness (1923) and The Secret of Self-Development (1926), two of the Haldeman-Julius Little Blue Books; 'The Art of Forgetting the Unpleasant', title essay of a third Little Blue Book; The Meaning of Culture (1929); In Defence of Sensuality (1930); A Philosophy of Solitude (1933); The Art of Happiness (1935), a short book that is entirely different

from the pamphlet of 1923; *Mortal Strife* (1942); *The Art of Growing Old* (1944); 'My Philosophy Up to Date: as Influenced by Living in Wales', a long essay included in *Obstinate Cymric* (1947); and *In Spite Of* (1953).

Each of these works is entirely distinct from the others. They do not repeat themselves; rather they expound in different ways and develop Powys's philosophy of life over thirty years, yet not so that the last, In Spite Of, is inconsistent with the first, The Art of Happiness of 1923. [4]

*... Interest in [Powys's] life-technique is concentrated in Scandinavia and Germany ... In contrast, Powys's publishing history, and thereby what can be deduced about the response of large numbers of readers, indicates a somewhat different story. During his lifetime none of his books were reissued in paperback editions in Britain or the USA. Nor did any of the novels appear in popular series. On the other hand, Jonathan Cape brought out *The Meaning of Culture*, first published in London in 1930, in his 'Life and Letters Series' in 1932 and four years later in the Traveller's Library. Similarly *The Art of Happiness*, published by John Lane in 1935, entered 'The Bodley Head Library' in 1940. It is noteworthy that while Cape took no more of Powys's fiction after *Wolf Solent*, he went on to publish no less than four of the 'philosophical' books: *The Meaning of Culture*, *A Philosophy of Solitude*, *Mortal Strife* and *The Art of Growing Old*.*

*Not only were these books much shorter than the novels: they would not attract libel actions and, above all, they sold very well. The outstanding bestseller was *The Meaning of Culture* which in the States went through fifteen impressions, no less than eleven in 1929 -- it had been published only in September -- before being reissued in 1939 in a Tenth Anniversary Edition, of which there were to be six impressions and another 6,500 copies by 1970, when it remained in print.*

*Powys was able to tell the translator of a Japanese edition in 1957 [5] that 'it is the only one of all the books (Fiction and otherwise) that I have written which has never once ceased, year after year, to earn me small sums of money ...' One can only assume that so many eager purchasers could not have been fooled by the misleading title; for *The Meaning of Culture* is nothing of the sort...* [6]

DG continues to discuss the role of these books and their convergence with individualist anarchism, in its exclusive concern with the individual. And for individual readers their effect has often been powerful -- notably on Jeff Kwintner, who was inspired to republish them all, valuing them much higher than the novels.

Notes

[1] Introduction to Tenth Anniversary Edition, 1939. See NL46, p.32

[2] *The Meaning of Culture* ch.2, 'Culture and Literature', pp. 51-52.

[3] *Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow* (2006). See NL60.

[4] *Powys Journal* XIV, pp. 50-51

[5] *Letters of JCP to Ichiro Hara* ed. Anthony Head, Cecil Woolf 1990

[6] *Powys Journal* XIV, pp. 52-53

Geoffrey West
An Essay on Culture

This review of The Meaning of Culture was first published in the Times Literary Supplement 3 April 1930. Geoffrey West (1900-1944?) was a bibliographer, literary critic, novelist, biographer and prolific book reviewer for the TLS in the 1930s. He also published book reviews and articles in the theosophical periodical The Aryan Path (to which JCP also contributed articles), and John Middleton Murry's Adelphi magazine. Geoffrey West reviewed other books by the Powyses in the TLS including JCP's Autobiography, The Art of Happiness, In Defence of Sensuality, Maiden Castle and A Philosophy of Solitude. He reviewed Llewelyn's Damnable Opinions and Impassioned Clay as well as stories by TFP such as Captain Patch, Goat Green and The Two Thieves. Geoffrey West adopted his name as a pseudonym for G.H.Wells to avoid confusion with H.G. Wells. West's own books include A Bibliography of H.G.Wells (1925), Three Men: Three Women (1928, Texas), The Life of Annie Besant (1929), H G Wells, A Sketch for a Portrait (1930) Deucalion or the Future of Literary Criticism (1930), The Problem of Arnold Bennett (1932), and Charles Darwin, the Fragmentary Man (1937). West's literary papers and his extensive correspondence with many writers of the 1920s and 1930s have been deposited at the Harry Ransom Centre in Austin.

Chris Thomas

Mr. Powys has imposed upon this book a somewhat alarming machinery of Part I: 'Analysis of Culture', Part II: 'Application of Culture', and the like, which actually is very little justified in his matter. What he attempts is no intellectual diagnosis of an academic abstraction; he sees culture as a living fact – one might say, as life itself – and his most general description is made in terms essentially personal. To apply a logical judgement to an essay not less organic than his conception of the term it seeks to define would be about as effective as trying to cut a running stream with penknife. He is, like his brothers, a lyrical writer; and if at certain points the critic may wish to effect a simplification or to obviate repetition he will soon realize that it is only to be done at the expense of incidental but never irrelevant beauties of thought or of description.

It is therefore not for us to complain that Mr. Powys leaves somewhat vague the distinction between the process of culture which is necessarily conscious, and its achievement which is no less necessarily unconscious. He rightly sees both as but different aspects of a single vital activity, which has first to be robbed of life before it is possible to apply to it the surgery of intellectual analysis. The basis of culture

he takes to be a definite attitude to existence rooted in the personality; it begins in “the confronting of the ‘not-self’ by a consciously integrated self.” Its purpose is the fullest realisation of all the possibilities of life through the deliberate exercise of mental habits conducive to the development of personality; and it finds its sole justification in increased happiness, resting ultimately upon a calm acceptance of our human destinies. It grows like a flower out of the soil of a placid contemplation of such elements in one’s environment as offer some suggestion of the eternal – the simplest and most natural facts of life and death envisioned in Nature’s wide perspective of “earth, air and sea; of sun and moon, and the day and the night.” Books and art are, under contemporary conditions, absolutely essential, but rather as fertilisers to fortify, to make more subtle and more strong, the individual in his conflict with the many obstacles to culture set up by our crowded, bustling, uncontemplative city life. From philosophy he derives “both the scepticism to stand up against every dogmatic claim and the imagination to treat with reverence and humility every original hint and illuminating suggestion”; from literature and painting alike a heightening and enrichment of the personal vision; and from poetry in particular the power to find peace in realising the accumulated tradition of human feeling inherent in “birth and death, food and fire, sleep and waking, the motion of the winds, the cycles of the stars, the budding and falling of the leaves, the ebbing and flowing of the tides.”

Thus Mr. Powys conceives culture as a technique for a fuller living, but with qualifications. We have already said that this is a very personal essay, and he not only describes but limits culture in terms of himself. As one to whom absence of faith makes religion personally unattainable, culture is to him essentially liberation from all dogma. He argues – or rather asserts – that culture and religion are mutually exclusive because identical in their aims while opposed in their methods. Both satisfy the same psychological need in relating the individual to his environment; but while each religion asserts a Truth, culture accepts the equality of all truths, that there are as many “separate truths or illusions” as there are men and women, and that the ultimate wisdom is “to consider one’s path not the noblest or the wisest, but simply one’s own.” It is a gospel leading directly to a “morality of culture” positing (a) an instinctive communion with some hypothetical first cause; (b) a determination to be happy; (c) a refusal to interfere with other people, but to treat them with compassion and courtesy; and (d) a constant refinement of our powers of perception and imaginative analysis.

There can be no doubt as to the appeal of such a creed, especially when set forth in prose not unworthy of the great tradition, despite some occasional lapses. But can we accept it as wholly satisfactory? The weapon of culture, says Mr. Powys, is selection. “In vain the trivial, the repulsive, the loathsome, besiege the Psyche

and seek to hypnotise her. By long practice she has learnt the art of dealing with these things – the art of forgetting that they exist.” Stoical-epicurean is Mr. Powys’s own epithet for his attitude – a tension between gratitude for all joy and defiance for all pain; but is there not here too much of the epicurean, too little of the stoic? Probably most of us can achieve no more, but must the ideal indeed be measured by our own personal limitations? May we not without priggishness still find a higher inspiration in those in those to whom the miseries of the world would give no rest until they had found in their secret hearts the power to out-stare the Gorgon and to find happiness in despite, not in forgetfulness, of the loathsome, the trivial and the repulsive?

Yet Mr. Powys takes their road if he does not travel all their way; and no feeling of failure on the ultimate lap (how few have achieved better!) can change the fact that he has written a book which itself enhances one’s apprehension of the happiness of simply being alive, and which as one reads evokes new beauty in all one’s surroundings. No one in reading it can doubt that Mr. Powys himself has lived his creed.

Michael Oakeshott

A review of The Meaning of Culture

First published in The Cambridge Review, 51 (1929–30), pp. 367–8

It seems that three different notions of culture have gone to shape our civilization. And, while it is impossible to reconcile them, there are few periods of our history when they have not been operative together. The first is the notion of culture as the **indiscriminate acquisition of knowledge** of whatever sort or kind: the pathetic, febrile eagerness for encyclopaedic information. This notion is, I believe, congenial both to youth and to old age. It is instinctive in youth, the natural condition of which is activity ill-distinguished from external achievement: in old age it is calculated, because often the only superiority old age can claim is sheer quantity of experience and, since it may be expected to make the most of what it has, its inclination will be towards a **quantitative view of culture**. Nevertheless, it is, I believe, a fanatic, breathless view, totally out of harmony with the real conditions of human life: it has no answer ready for death. The opposites here are **Culture and Ignorance**. The second is the notion of culture as the **acquisition of ‘the best that has been thought and known in the world.’** This is naturally associated with the name of Matthew Arnold, and seems to lie behind many of the literary opinions of Mr T.S.Eliot. It is a seductive view, and appears to offer some escape from the purposelessness and anxiety of the other view. In literature we are bidden read ‘the classics,’ in life follow **a path beaten by ‘great men’**; art consists of ‘the masters’ – who are, so to speak, born old. This view seems to have some answer for death; it is not the hopeless pursuit of an ever-retreating aim. And here the opposites are **Culture and Anarchy**.

These two notions of culture [*Culture vs. Ignorance: indiscriminate acquisition of knowledge, and Culture vs Anarchy: acquisition of the best that has been thought and known by "great men"*) and dominated by a stronger sense of the past and the future than of the present, lie together at the root of our civilization; their voices have been loudest, their influence predominant. But there is a third view, which begins by throwing over altogether the notion, common to both the former views, of culture in terms of acquisition. It proposes neither a quantitative, nor (in the usual sense) a qualitative, but a personal criterion for culture. Behind it lies an improvident desire for freedom, integrity: like Montaigne, it is 'besotted unto liberty.' Nothing is essential but an integrated self whose purpose is not to remember, adopt or assimilate, but to live a life contemporary with itself. The past and future are nothing to it except in so far as they come alive in the present. The sense of mortality, which, I suppose, every notion of culture must meet, in this case leads, neither to feverish activity, nor to a desire for a 'classic' permanence, but to a determination to find an altogether extemporary satisfaction in life. What is valued is not the fruit of experience, but the flower – something we know only in a present enjoyment and cannot garner. Death is not outrun; it is denied, dismissed. This notion opposes Culture to Despotism; and, I suppose, may not improperly be associated with the name of Epicurus.

Mr Powys' book is an exposition of the meaning and implications of this third notion of culture. 'The essence of culture,' he says, 'is the conscious development of our awareness of existence.' Culture does not show itself among men as something acquired and noteworthy; it does not, in order to flourish, require to 'show' itself at all. And where it is confronted with opposition, it can afford 'to use the weapon of ironical submission,' for it can sustain no irreparable defeat so long as it refuses to compete with 'the world.' It is the determination, and all that this involves, 'to abide by one's own taste – though naturally with many ironic reserves.' 'The least possible amount of culture, when what it does is to set free and round off the natural movements of the individual psyche, is better than the greatest possible amount of it when it hangs heavy and stiff upon the outside of one's skin.' Culture is, then, a way of life, a religion. It does not imply that we consider our own path the noblest or the wisest, but simply that we know it to be our own and value it as such. Culture desires to avoid, not 'specific errors,' but any hint of tyranny.

The book is written with distinction, and there is no doubt that it embodies the experiences of a peculiarly sensitive mind. But, as an exposition of this notion of culture, it appears to me in some respects defective. It moves round the idea, but its grasp is not always sure and the elusive prey escapes. For example, this view of culture can tolerate no separation of pursuits or interests, everything is seen to subserve a single end, and Mr Powys insists upon this. But his book is divided into two 'parts' – The Analysis of Culture, and The Application of Culture – and twelve chapters – e.g. Culture and Literature, Culture and Religion, Culture and Poetry, Culture and Happiness – and in

so far as these divisions are insisted upon they introduce another and quite extraneous view of culture. It seems to me that its form of exposition disagrees with what he wants to say. This, perhaps, is not very important; but if we could do without *talking* in a way contradictory of our real view, we should be less in danger of *thinking* in this way. Then again, Mr Powys sometimes falls into a way of speaking which belongs, not to his view of culture, but rather to the view which opposes culture to anarchy. He speaks of 'the classics,' 'good books,' 'important things'; whereas whether a thing is important, or a book good, depends (in his view) not on the intrinsic character of the thing or book, but upon the person with whom it comes in contact. And there is a hint now and again of a desire for that spurious intellectual cosmopolitanism which affects to be equally at home with all literatures and equally sympathetic to all religions. We ought, I think, to notice these things, because an allegiance to a particular view is uncertain until we have thrown overboard all that conflicts with it. And this, I think, Mr Powys has not quite achieved. At times, also, he lapses into exceedingly commonplace advice on what to read and how to look at pictures which, in a writer of less distinction and sincerity, would appear to come perilously near to Mr. Arnold Bennett's worst 'How to live on twenty-four hours a day' style. And his chapter on Culture and Painting is little better than a rag-bag. However, these are faults mainly of exposition, and if the book had been thrown into a less imposing, less atomic form, all that is commonplace in it (and there is very little) would, I think, have fallen away from sheer lack of place or relevance. And we should be left with a book on the level of its best chapters – those on Culture and Nature, Culture and Love, and Culture and Human Relations – full of uncommon insight.

The value of the book seems to lie partly in its appropriateness to the present time. It presents a view of culture which, indeed, depends upon no particular circumstances and which, on the whole, meets more difficulties than it raises, but, what is more, it meets some of the difficulties which are peculiarly our own. This is not the place to consider how far an attempt to follow it out would lead to a way of life very different from our present way. Mr Powys sees clearly enough that there is, to say the least, no pre-established harmony between his notion of culture and the modern world, but I should like to have found in his book some more positive discussion of whatever relation there is. As it stands, culture seems to offer an effective escape, but behind its happiness hovers always, in crass contradiction, the confused and gloomy background of life as it is passed by 'the world.'

But I must not appear ungrateful. The book has the rare merit of being entirely free from any infection of sentimentality; and, though it cannot be said to have performed for its notion of culture what, for another notion, *Culture and Anarchy* performed, it is certainly worthy of its theme.

**Oakeshott's notebooks record visiting Llewelyn at Chydyok in the 1930s, quoted by John Gray in his talk at the 2015 conference – see Newsletter 86, N&N, p.38-39*

Chris Thomas

JCP, B.J.O. Nordfeldt and Raymond Jonson

JCP's prose style is characterised by frequent similes, metaphors and tropes that allude to specific works of art and references to individual artists, which throw an element of glamour over his mode of expression and evidence his vital capacity for thinking in terms of visual images. This rich source of thematic material has been explored in detail in articles by Timothy Hyman, Subi Swift and Ian Hughes. [1]

Clearly JCP was deeply interested in the visual arts. In a letter to Ichiro Hara he declared that *painters are my favourite artists*. Hence the welcome he gave to those painters who visited him such as Sidney Nolan, and Cecil and Elizabeth Collins (whose response to JCP's mature work is discussed by Timothy Hyman), as well as Augustus John, Ivan Opfer, Adrian Bury, and Elsa Vaudrey. He included an essay on El Greco in *Visions and Revisions* and planned an essay on Beardsley for *Suspended Judgments*. He discusses his responses to modern art in *Confessions of Two Brothers* and in *The Meaning of Culture*. Two of his fictional characters are practising artists (Ralph Dangelis in *Wood and Stone* and Robert Canyot in *After My Fashion*). In *Wolf Solent* he refers to artists such as Alma Tadema, Frederick Leighton, Landseer, Benozzo Gozzoli and Filippino Lippi, as well as Raphael's painting of the Transfiguration (which also appears in *Wood and Stone*). We know that JCP gave public lectures on Watteau and French art [2], on Spanish art and architecture [3] and on the history of European art [4]. JCP's most fervent and passionate description of his aesthetic tastes and preferences (especially Dutch art and old landscape paintings), including his obsession with colour over form, can be found in *Autobiography* [5].

JCP rarely mentions individual modern artists in his publications although he does refer to Matisse and Picasso in *Wood and Stone*, to Brancusi in his diary, to Augustus John and Elsa Vaudrey in letters to Louis Wilkinson and to the sculptor Paul Piel in *Autobiography*. He also refers to other modern artists, such as Raymond Jonson in *The Meaning of Culture*, and to B.J.O. Nordfeldt, in the introduction to an exhibition of his paintings.

Bror Julius Olssen Nordfeldt (1878-1955) was a Swedish-American painter, etcher and printer who specialised in portraits, landscapes, seascapes, city views, still lifes, and genre scenes of the American Southwest. Nordfeldt was a founding member of the influential and pioneering theatre group, the Provincetown Players, for whom he designed costumes and stage sets. He was closely acquainted with Maurice Browne and the Chicago Little Theatre where he designed the stage set for Browne's 1913 production of *The Trojan Women*. According to Browne in his autobiography, Nordfeldt recommended one of his pupils, Raymond Jonson (1891-1982) [6] to take on the full-time job of stage designer, stage manager, and scene painter at the Chicago Little

Theatre. [7] Jonson was also responsible for lighting and staging JCP's lectures at the Little Theatre [8]. Jonson's portrait of JCP, painted around 1917, reflects the influence of his teacher. [9] Herbert Hartel says that *Bror Nordfeldt was the Chicago-based modernist painter who most influenced Jonson's development during his years in Chicago.* [10]

Nordfeldt studied at the famous Académie Julian in Paris and was strongly influenced by Cézanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh and Matisse. In 1919 Nordfeldt moved to New Mexico where he helped to establish the Santa Fé Artists' Colony and remained there until the late 1930s. [11]

JCP's colleague and friend H.L.Mencken much admired Nordfeldt's art, although he seemed to know very little about him:

Probably the best portrait that I have ever seen in America is one of Theodore Dreiser by Bror Nordfeldt. Who this Bror Nordfeldt might be I haven't the slightest notion...he has painted Dreiser in a capital manner... The thing is worth a hundred Sargents... Nordfeldt in his view of Dreiser somehow gets the right effect. It is rough painting, but real painting. [12] Sheldon Cheney (1886-1980), art critic, founder and editor of *Theatre Arts* magazine, champion of the little theatre movement in America and supporter of Browne's Chicago Little Theatre, said of Nordfeldt that he was one of the *great creative artists of America in the period of the emergence of modernism.* [13]



B.J, Nordfeldt – Street Scene

But why specifically should we remember Nordfeldt apart from his important association with the Chicago Little Theatre? Perhaps Nordfeldt is worth remembering because JCP was also an admirer of his paintings and particularly an admirer of his ability to evoke the spirit of place by experimenting with the potential of form and colour to convey mood and emotions. We know that JCP loved and admired Post Impressionism *because Post Impressionism has a fine barbaric sense of the splendid magic of the surface of things*, but disliked Futurism [14]. JCP praised Raymond Jonson for the *arresting* quality of his work as well as his ability to *touch...the nerves of the imagination with a tremor of that excitement which only genius gives* [15]. These are qualities that JCP might have also perceived in the *modern* art of Bror Nordfeldt.

In 1920 the Arts Club of Chicago organised an exhibition of Nordfeldt's latest work: *At the [Chicago] Arts Club an exhibition of recent paintings by Bror Nordfeldt is on. The foreword to the catalogue advises that they are neither entirelyly decorative nor representative in their intent, but neither from the foreword nor the exhibition can one give an adequate idea of their motive. John Cowper Powys who writes the foreword assures us that the aim of art is the communication of the human mood. If the artist felt as intensely in creating these things as does the beholder upon viewing the finished work, nothing but the most kindly and compassionate of human feelings could be entertained toward him by anyone.* [16]

I have not been able to locate a copy of the catalogue issued by the Arts Club of Chicago [17]. JCP's foreword to the exhibition is not listed in any bibliography of JCP or cited by any writer or commentator on Nordfeldt's work. If anyone can locate a copy of the catalogue it would be worthwhile consulting the complete foreword as this would surely provide good evidence of JCP's appreciation of some aspects of contemporary art in America in the 1920s.

Notes

1. Timothy Hyman, 'JCP, the Quest for the Pictorial Equivalent' (*PJ*, Vol. VIII, 1998); Subi Swift, 'An Eye for Interiors: the Influence of Genre Painting on the work of JCP' (*Powys Review* No.24, 1989); 'Allusion, Illusion and Reality, Fact and fiction in *Wolf Solent*' (*JCP's Wolf Solent, Critical Studies*, edited by Belinda Humfrey, 1990).
2. *New York Times*, 8 April 1915
3. Letter to Llewelyn Powys, 14 April 1923 (Elwin, vol.1, 1975)
4. In September 1921 JCP gave a course of six lectures at the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco on Florentine and Venetian art, 17th century Dutch art, 16th and 17th century Spanish art and modern French art (Cezanne, Renoir, Matisse and Gauguin) as well as on Watteau, Claude and Poussin. The lectures were reported favourably in a local newspaper: *Professor Powys has succeeded in drawing many of the young students to his lectures. They are interested in his interpretation of the soul of great artists as seen through their works, for*

- he speaks not as a technician, but as a psychologist (*The Argonaut*, 12 September, 1921).
5. *What a pleasure I have slowly, very, very slowly come to derive from painting. It is the only art outside literature that will ever deeply appeal to me* (*Autobiography*, Macdonald, 1967, p.301).
 6. *Too Late to Lament*, Maurice Browne (Gollancz, p.122). Many years later, in the 1930s, Raymond Jonson developed an abstract and “transcendental” style of painting influenced by his encounter with the mystical and theosophical ideas of Nicholas Roerich (1874-1947). JCP participated with Roerich in a public symposium at St Mark’s in the Bouverie in New York, on 9 November 1929.
 7. Raymond Jonson himself told his mother in a letter that it was actually a local sculptress, Lou Wall Moore, who introduced him to Browne. Jonson’s letter to his mother is quoted in *The Art of Raymond Jonson* by Ed Garman (1972), p.25 and p.191. Lou Wall Moore designed the costumes for *The Trojan Women* in 1913 and also provided rehearsal space for Browne’s actors in her large studio. (Browne p.118)
 8. *Autobiography*, John Cowper Powys (Macdonald, 1967, p.513). Jonson’s innovations in lighting and set design were recognised by admiring reviews of his work in the *Little Review* (November 1914 and March, April and November 1915); the October 1916 edition of *Poetry*, in a review of Browne’s production of Cloyd Head’s *Grotesques*, referred to Jonson’s *rare ability and originality as a scenic designer*, his *strange effects* and his *creative and adventurous imagination*. See also *The Work of C. Raymond Jonson* by Eunice Tietjens in *Theatre Arts Magazine* (July 1920).
 9. The portrait is reproduced as the frontispiece in *Essays on John Cowper Powys*, edited by Belinda Humfrey, University of Wales Press, 1972.
 10. *Raymond Jonson and the Spiritual in Modernist and Abstract Painting* (Herbert Hartel, 2018).
 11. *American Art Colonies, 1850-1930*, Steve Shipp (1996, p.103). JCP briefly visited Santa Fe in 1927 where he met his friends Gladys and Arthur Ficke and discovered a lost cousin, Warwick Powys. See: *John Cower Powys in New Mexico* by Ben Jones, *Powys Review* 21 (1987/1988). JCP dedicated *The Meaning of Culture*, 1929, to Warwick.
 12. *The Smart Set*, May 1920, *Répétition Générale*, no.23, pp.36-37.
 13. *Nordfeldt the Painter*, Van Deren Coke, introduction by Sheldon Cheney, 1972.
 14. *Confessions of Two Brothers*, Sinclair Browne, 1982, (1916), pp.129-130.
 15. *The Meaning of Culture*, Village Press, 1974, p.72.
 16. *American Art News*, 1 May 1920. The exhibition, ‘Recent Paintings by Bror Nordfeldt’ was held at the Arts Club, 21-28 April 1920.
 17. The comprehensive list of exhibitions held at the Arts Club from 1916 to 2018, on the website of the Arts Club of Chicago does not, however, indicate that a catalogue was actually produced for the exhibition of Bror Nordfeldt’s paintings in 1920, so perhaps the reference in *American Art News* is only to an informal handlist with an introductory note by JCP.

A Glastonbury Romance: Notes and Queries

I'm a true fan of JCP who I believe is truly extraordinary (in several senses of the word). The following notes and questions arise out of a spirit of curiosity.

What is it that Lord P. owns? The initial context below is a discussion between Dave Spear, Red Robinson and Paul Trent. The edition I'm quoting from was first published in 1996 by The Overlook Press, and the chapter in question is titled *The Miracle*.

Pages 718/19. *Well, Mr. Trent, said Dave, it's like this. It appears that the whole of the land on which Glastonbury's built belongs to Lord P. And it appears that on the first of January all the leases of it come to an end....*

Pages 721/22. Dave Spear says : *But everyone knows how badly Lord P. is in need of money these days; and of course the Council has the power to raise the local taxes; and of course the Mayor – in so important a matter – would be prepared to advance a good big sum on the Council's security...*

Page 994 discloses that the bank, like Wallop's shop *remained an obstinate island of capitalism in a socialistic lake*. And on page 836 it is implied that part of Philip Crowe's dye factory stands on Crowe's own land.

So what exactly does Lord P. own? Clearly not the Council houses. Does he own the land on which they are built? Why is he in financial straits, owning as he does "all" or a considerable amount of the town's land, and at least some of the buildings on that land?

Page 871 states that Lord P's finances are "heavily taxed." But not *that* taxed, surely!?

What is the Commune? It is run by a triumvirate of Trent, Spear and Robinson, though dependent on the goodwill and influence of John Geard; resented by many of the poor whom it is meant to represent; it creams off the profits from tourists and pilgrims and/or takes a share of profits from the various businesses (in addition to *all* the profits from its own municipal factory). Which people (apart from the triumvirate) are better off because of it, particularly in its early days? Why does it survive?

Canon Crowe's will is read in early March and the pageant is held on midsummer's day. Is three and a half months sufficient time to conceive the idea and plan/rehearse it, and publicise it on the Europe-wide scale described? I don't think so. 18 months would be pushing it....

When is the story set? Page 346 states that Cordelia Geard (later Evans) is of *the second decade of the twentieth century*. So Cordelia was born on or after 1 January 1910. She is older than her sister Crummie. The latter presents her as being, one presumes, at least 19, so let's say Cordelia is at least 21 going on 22 (she sometimes seems to act older than that). Then the setting is presumably the early 1930s. If so, it is odd that page 1093 should say of Cordelia : ... *it was the first impression of the power of the waters that sank into the girl's mind and returned to her afterward, again and again, to the last hour of her consciousness*. Does the tense suggest Cordelia died between the time marked by the end

of the narrative, and the date of publication? There is a similar curiosity on page 1,055, where it is stated of Owen Evans that *visitors to Glastonbury can still see* him walking up Wells Old Road. The word “still” suggests some considerable passage of time.

Philip Crowe pays Will Zoyland ten times less (page 825) than he would have to pay anyone else to do the same job at the tin mine. Really? Would someone today work for say £2,500 pa. when the market rate is £25,000? Or £30 then instead of £300?

Mat Decker's father's great-grandfather dozed when he should have been supporting William of Orange (page 132). Mat is aged 60 (page 111) so was born around 1870. The latest date of birth for his ancestor must be about 1670. That's an average of 50 years between each generation.

It was no vague thing that he (Evans) resolved to do; for his imaginative projection was as concrete and palpable as the worst of these silhouettes of horror engraved in the holy excess of sadistic satisfaction by Dante's rationalised dementia (page 1004). Does this imply that the book lurking in the cellar is by Dante (*these images*)? Who wrote *The Unpardonable Sin*?

Susan Rands

How much land did the Marquess of P hold?

Certainly JCP does not tell us in any precise manner. How could he? Anyone who lives in the countryside is aware of the great significance of land ownership and its complications – leaseholds, freeholds, tenancies for life and the rights bestowed by wills. It often takes a team of lawyers to sort it out and even then the answer can often be proved either way.

Glastonbury Abbey was a huge landowner at the time of the Dissolution. Thomas Thynne, later Lord Bath, of Longleat, bailiff and right-hand man of the Duke of Somerset, acquired much of it and the family continued to add to their holdings through the ages. There is a huge repository of deeds in the muniment room at Longleat, much visited by numerous historians although they are charged £25.00 per day.

If, as seems probable, Lord P. in *A Glastonbury Romance* derives from the 5th Marquess of Bath, 1868-1946, we can have some idea of the extent of his holdings. Dr J H Bettey, Reader in Local History at the University of Bristol, discusses the Longleat estate of the Marquess of Bath, centred in Wiltshire but comprising more than 50,000 acres extending to Somerset, Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Shropshire [1]. However in the Glastonbury area he only had the following left by 1927: Backwell (705 acres), Cheddar (1899 acres), Chilcompton (361 acres), East Horrington (669 acres), Walton (2284 acres), and Wedmore (10 acres) [2].

We have a record of him selling the Walton estate next to Street in 1939 [3] and he must have made similar arrangements for other parts of his property after the First World War when all estates were in difficulties and many were taken over by the National Trust.

Longleat was able to hold on in spite of the efforts of James Lees Milne, amusingly described in one of his diaries and also in the biography [4]. By 1928, the 5th Marquess was a widower living alone in that huge house. But relief came later. The Royal School at Bath for the daughters of officers was billeted there for the duration.

There are numerous similarities between JCP's Marquess of P, and the 5th Marquess and it is tempting to expatiate on them, but so far no mention of him has come to light in JCP's letters and diaries. Could JCP have been sued for libel as in the case of Captain Hodgkinson of Wookey Hole?

All those who went on the conducted walks at our last conference in 2018 will know how near to the reality are the settings of the novel. But the one particular place that no one can find is anything resembling 'Mark's Court'. Elinor Challiner tells me that there is no record of the Baths ever owning anything in the area of Mark.

Notes

- [1] *Estates and the English Countryside*, by J.H. Bettey, Batsford, 1992
- [2] Information kindly supplied by Elinor Challiner, Assistant Archivist and Records Manager, Longleat
- [3] *Central Somerset Gazette*, 22 April 2004
- [4] Michael Block, *James Lees Milne, The Life*, p.100, Murray, 2009

Susan Rands with Chris Thomas

Forgotten Novels: Glastonbury in Historic Fiction

On 23 November 2018, Dr Tim Hopkinson-Ball gave a fascinating talk to the Glastonbury Antiquarian Society on 'The Forgotten Novel: Glastonbury in Historic Fiction'. Because JCP's *A Glastonbury Romance* is so well known it got only a brief mention: *Suffice to say that this monumental tome is the pre-eminent work of 'Glastonbury' fiction and the standard against which all other works – perhaps unfairly – tend to be judged.*

Amazingly there are about twenty novels set in Glastonbury before JCP's and about 15 since. Tim concentrated on six of the former group of novels, and two of these, *The Rebel Passion* by Katherine Burdekin, 1929 [2] and *Uncanonized* by Margaret Horton Potter (Chicago, 1900) [3] sound particularly interesting (*see below*).

Tim discussed early novels with a Glastonbury setting such as *The Tor Hill* by Horatio Smith, 1826; *The Last Abbot of Glastonbury* by Augustine Clark, 1886; *The Abbot's Barn* by Gertrude Harraden, 1922; and *The Joyous Day* by Arthur Goadby, 1923.

He continued, saying *The last couple of decades have seen the publication of a flurry of 'Glastonbury' tales of varying quality*, listing Arthur Porges' stories in *Fantastic* magazine, 1964 and 1965 (a follower of the influential American pulp horror writer H.P.Lovecraft who was also interested in the history of Glastonbury

and the work of Frederick Bligh Bond), and books by Anne Rice, (*The Vampire Lestat*, 1985); Phil Rickman (*The Chalice*, 1993, and *The Bones of Avalon*, 2010); David Bowker (*The Butcher of Glastonbury*, 1998); LeAnne Hardy (*Glastonbury Tor*, 2006); Kenneth Parradine (*Glastonbury Tor*, 2010); Beth Francis (*The Rising of the Sun*, 2012); D.H. Davies (*Flight from Glastonbury*, 2015); Allan Mitchell (*Sherlock Holmes and the Ghoul of Glastonbury*, 2017); Conn Igulden (*Dunstan*, 2017); Bruce Garrard (*Petroc of Glastonbury*, 2017).

Tim concluded his talk by saying: *It is pleasing to think that over the last 192 years Glastonbury has inspired such varied works, from the gothic to the exploration of sexuality and theology, from the whimsy of fairy monks to the strict historicity of the serious novel, from the cheap adolescent comic to the major literary masterpiece. Long may it continue to do so.*

Notes by Chris Thomas

Dr Tim Hopkinson-Ball is Chairman of the Glastonbury Antiquarian Society. A former Trustee of Glastonbury Abbey, he has worked for several years as Archivist at the Benedictine abbey of Downside at Stratton-on-the-Fosse near Radstock. Hopkinson-Ball graduated from Kent University where he read theology and religious studies. He is the author of two books – The Rediscovery of Glastonbury: Frederick Bligh Bond, Architect of the New Age (Sutton, 2007) [1] and Glastonbury, Origins of the Sacred (Antioch Press, 2012). Hopkinson-Ball has given talks on the religious history of Glastonbury and Wells for numerous societies, including the Society of Antiquaries of London. He lives in Glastonbury.

[1] JCP mentions Bligh Bond (1864-1945), although not directly by name, several times in *A Glastonbury Romance*:— *A famous modern antiquary – guided, he himself declared, by supernatural agency – had traced the foundations of that great monarch’s chapel. (AGR, Macdonald, 1966, p.229); There was an antiquary down here yesterday – not the one who found the Edgar chapel by the help of that spirit... (p.520).*

[2] **Katherine Burdekin** (1896-1963), aka Murray Constantine and Kay Burdekin, was a novelist, short story writer, playwright and poet. Although Burdekin’s fiction is hardly read at all today, her work has been made the subject of scholarly research including a doctoral thesis. Burdekin corresponded with the novelist Radclyffe Hall and the poet H.D., and shared ideas with Bertrand Russell. Her great-grandfather was the painter Joseph Wright of Derby. Burdekin’s sister, Rowena Cade, with whom she shared a deep interest in plays and acting, was the founder of the famous open-air



Glastonbury Abbey – a conjectural reconstruction – pencil drawing by Frederick Bligh Bond

Minnack theatre in Cornwall. Burdekin published 10 novels which were well received and critically successful: *Anna Colquhoun*, 1924; *The Reasonable Hope*, 1924; *The Burning Ring*, 1927; *The Rebel Passion*, 1929; *The Children's Country*, 1929; *Quiet Ways*, 1930; *Proud Man*, 1934; *The Devil, Poor Devil*, 1934; *Swastika Night*, 1937; *Venus in Scorpio*, 1940. However, much of her work still remains unpublished. She stopped writing in the 1950s. Burdekin was an innovative and ground-breaking writer, ahead of her own time, who focused on controversial issues and themes relating to feminism, gender, sexuality, androgyny, bi-sexuality, utopianism/dystopianism, religion, spiritualism, history, myth, fairy tales, politics, anti-Fascism, class, social commentary, fantasy, and time travel. In the 1930s Burdekin's work focused on strong opposition to Nazi Germany. Her early novels were conventional and realistic but with *The Rebel Passion* she began to explore more speculative subjects. Hopkinson-Ball said that *What makes The Rebel Passion particularly remarkable are the theological and sexual themes which Burdekin tackles.*

The Rebel Passion (the title was inspired by a phrase of Gilbert Murray in his introduction to his translation of *The Trojan Women* by Euripides (1905): *Pity is a rebel passion*), is set in the mid 12th century during the reign of King Stephen, and deals with the experiences of a monk, Giraldus, at Glastonbury Abbey, who is presented with a series of visions of the historical past, leading to an imaginary vision of an ideal future utopia when all women are treated equally with men. The novel ends with the words of Giraldus: *It is in Glastonbury that I have been happy, and come to a little measure of Understanding.* Burdekin's ability to project her mind into the past, re-imagine events, and reconstruct the medieval era, as well as her tendency to write in an obsessive and mediumistic way, suggest parallels with JCP.

- [3] **Margaret Horton Potter** (1881-1911) was the daughter of a millionaire steel manufacturer in Chicago. Her first novel, *A Social Lion*, written when she was only seventeen, is a satirical portrait of Chicago society, which was published under a pseudonym in 1899 but suppressed. Her other novels include: *The House of de Mailly*, a romance, 1901; *Istar*, a phantasy, 1902; *The Castle of Twilight*, 1903; *The Flame Gatherers*, 1904; *The Fire of Spring*, 1905 and *The Genius*, 1906. Potter had a personal history of alcohol and drug addiction. She was declared insane and committed to a sanatorium in 1910 (*New York Times*, 6 May 1910). She died the following year after taking an overdose of morphine (*New York Times*, 23 December 1911). Her novel *Uncanonized, a Romance of English Monachism*, 1900, is set almost entirely in Glastonbury and its environs at the time of King John at the end of the 12th and beginning of the 13th century. Potter's attempt to revive medieval language is unconvincing but her evocations of Glastonbury, its mysterious atmosphere and her descriptions of the surrounding landscape are quite effective: *Evening was falling upon the vale of Avalon – the shadowy, hazy, hot twilight after a mid-summer day. The pale leaves of the apple-trees hung limply from their boughs; but the great willows, which drooped over the marshy stream twisting lazily along toward the river Brue, now and again stirred a feathery limb in response to the delicacy of the western wind.* Hopkinson-Ball said that: *What's remarkable about Uncanonized isn't the novel's plot, but the level of research Potter clearly devoted to her work... the historical details... are astounding considering that this nineteen-year-old woman is not thought to have left Chicago or its environs.*

Books for Sale

To obtain any of these titles please contact Mike Taylor at: mike.taylor2019@outlook.com

- Powys J. C. 1933. *A Glastonbury Romance*, 2nd ed (July 1933), John Lane The Bodley Head Ltd, London. [Excellent condition of leaves but spine torn at top & faded & front & rear covers blotched & faded].
- Powys J. C. 1934. *Autobiography*, 1st ed, John Lane The Bodley Head Ltd, London. [Excellent condition].
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